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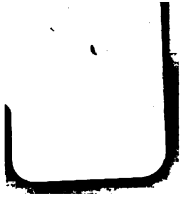

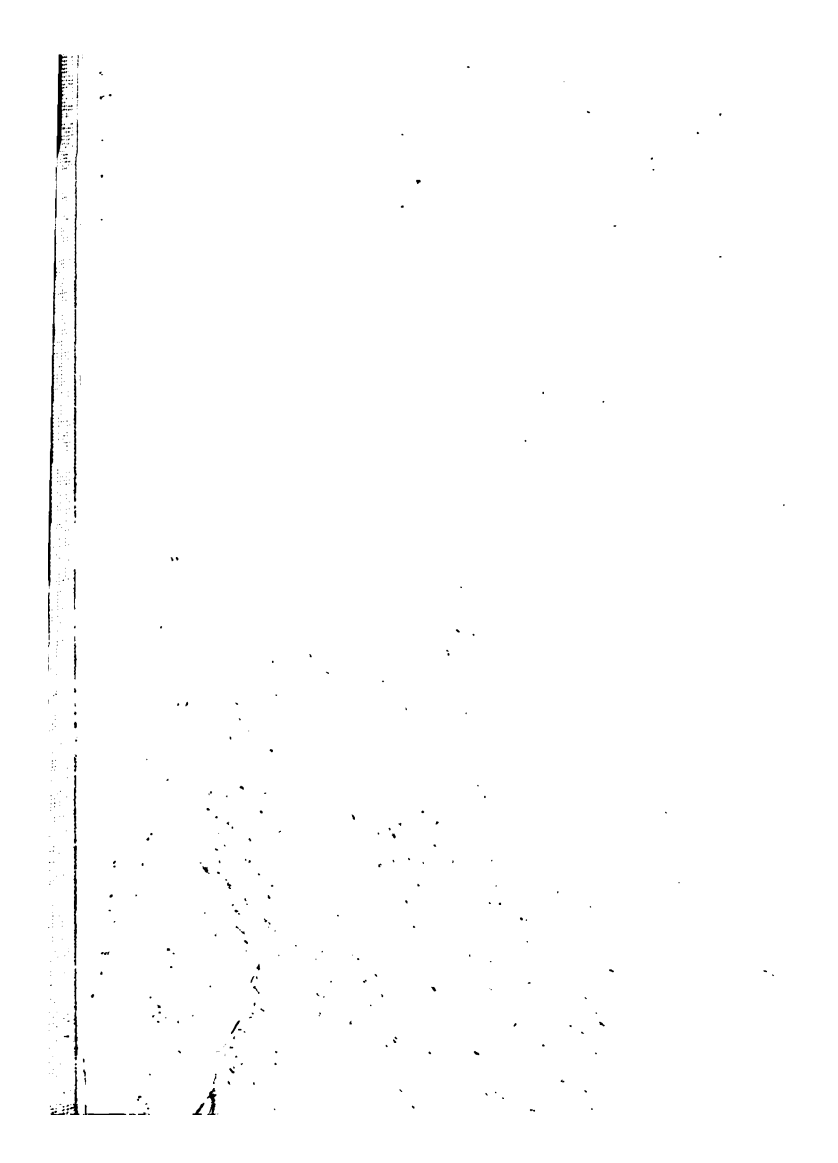

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCCXXIII.

HEARTSEASE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

HEARTSEASE

OR

THE BROTHER'S WIFE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE HEIR OF REDCLYFFE."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HEARTSEASE;

OR,

THE BROTHER'S WIFE.

VOL. II.

PART II.

(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER XVI.

Lord Percy sees my fall!
Chevy Chase.

Two days after, Miss Gardner calling, found Mrs. Martindale alone in the drawing-room, and pretty well again. The project for the party was now fully developed, and it was explained to Violet, with regrets that she was unable to share it, and hopes that Theodora and her brother would not fail to join it.

"Thank you, I believe Captain Martindale will be at Windsor; he will be on guard next week."

"Ah! that is provoking. He is so valuable at this kind of thing, and I am sure would enjoy it. He would meet some old schoolfellows. You must use your influence to prevent him from being lazy. Guardsmen can always get leave when they think it worth while."

"Perhaps if Theodora wishes to go, he may manage it; but I am afraid it is not likely that he will be able."

"You will trust us for taking care of our dear Theodora," said Miss Gardner; "we know she is rather high-spirited, and not very fond of control. I can quite enter into your feelings of responsibility, but from my knowledge of her character, I should say that any sense of restraint is most galling to her. But even if we have not the pleasure of Captain Martindale's company, you may fully reckon on our watching over her, myself in especial, as a most dear younger sister."

"Is your party arranged?" asked Violet.

"Yes, I may say so. We hope for Mrs. Sedley and her daughters. Do you know them? Charming people whom we met in Paris."

Violet was not acquainted with them, and tried to find out who were the rest. They seemed to be all young ladies, or giddy young wives, like Mrs. Finch herself, and two or three foreigners. Few were personally known to the Martindales; Lord St. Erme was the only gentleman of their own set; and Violet could not smile as her visitor expected, on hearing how he had been enticed by hopes of meeting Miss Martindale.

Jane Gardner perceived the disapprobation. "Ah! well, — yes. One cannot but own that our dear Theodora's spirits do now and then make her a little bit of a flirt. It is the way with all such girls, you know. I am sure it was with my sister, but, as in her case, marriage is the only cure. You need not be in the least uneasy, I assure you. All will right itself, though a good deal may go on that startles sober-minded people like us. I could condole with you on the charge, but you will find it the only way not to seem to thwart her."

Violet thought it best to laugh and talk of something else.

"Then I depend on you for the cream of our party," said Miss Gardner, taking leave.

"I cannot tell whether Captain Martindale can come," said Violet, somewhat bewildered by the conversation.

"Is that girl a nonentity, or is she a deep genius?" said Jane to herself, as she walked home. "I cannot make her out. Now for the trial of power! If Theodora Martindale yields to the Fotheringhams now, and deserts Georgina, it will be a confirmation of all the absurd reports. As long as I have it to say the Martindale family are as intimate as ever, I have an answer for Lady Fotheringham, and if Mark is smitten with her, so much the better! I hope Percy Fotheringham may be properly rewarded for his presumption and ill-nature. The sooner they quarrel the better. I will send Theodora a note to put her on her mettle."

The note arrived, while Percy was spending the evening in Cadogan-place, and Theodora talking so happily that she grudged the interruption of opening and reading it.

"DEAREST THEODORA, — One line further to secure you, though I told Mrs. Martindale of our plans. She would make no promises, but we reckon on *your* independence of action at least. 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot?'

"Yours affectionately,

"J. GARDNER.

"P. S. — Mrs. Martindale looked very well. I hope she will have no recurrence of faintings."

"From Jane Gardner," said Theodora; "only to put me in mind of the pic-nic. Will you go, Arthur?"

"I never was more glad to be on her Majesty's service! What an abominable bore it would be!"

"That is what gentlemen alwas say of pic-nics," said Theodora.

"Not at all," said Percy. "A real country party of merry happy people, knowing each other well, and full of genuine honest glee, is one of the most enjoyable things that can be."

"That it is!" cried Violet. "There was the day we went up Skiddaw, with no one but our cousins and Mr. Fanshawe, and dined on the mountain in sight of the valley

of St. John; and the rain came on, and Mr. Fanshawe sat all the time holding an umbrella over Annette and the pigeon-pie."

"That was worth doing," said Percy; "but for a parcel of fine ladies and gentlemen to carry the airs and graces, follies and competitions, born in ball-rooms and nursed in soirées, out into pure country air and daylight, is an insult to the green fields and woods."

"That is a speech in character of author," said Theodora.

"In character of rational being."

"Which you would not have made if the party had not been Georgina Finch's."

"I had no notion whose it was, or anything about it."

"It is for her birth-day, Tuesday," said Violet. "They are to have a steamer to Richmond, walk about and dine there; but I should not think that it would be very pleasant. Mrs. Bryanstone had one of these parties last year to Hampton Court; and she told me that unless they were well managed they were the most disagreeable things in the world: people always were losing each other, and getting into scrapes. She declared she never would have another."

"Mrs. Bryanstone has no idea of management," said Theodora.

"I know who has less," said Arthur. "Your Georgina will let every one take their chance, and the worse predicaments people get into the louder she will laugh."

"There is nothing so intolerable as a woman who thinks herself too fashionable for good manners," said Percy.

"Is any one waiting for an answer?" asked Violet.

"There is none," said Theodora. "They know I mean to go."

"To go!" exclaimed all three, who had thought the question settled by Arthur's refusal.

"Yes, of course; I go with Georgina."

"With Mark Gardner, and the king of the clothes-brushes, and all their train, in mustaches and parti-

coloured parasols!" cried Percy. "Theodora, I thought you were a sensible woman."

"I am sorry if I forfeit that claim to your regard."

"Well, if I was your mother! However, it is devoutly to be hoped that it may rain."

He then changed the conversation, and no more passed on this subject till, as he wished her good night, he said, in a low voice, "Think better of it, Theodora."

"My mind is made up," was the proud reply.

In a few seconds he called Arthur to him on the stairs. "Arthur," he said, "if your sister is set on this wrong-headed scheme, at least don't let her go with no one to look after her. Let her have some respectable person with her, merely for propriety's sake. She fancies me prejudiced, and we have agreed to dispute no more on the woman's goings on; but you have the keeping of her now."

"I wish Mrs. Finch was at Jericho, and Theodora after her!" exclaimed Arthur, petulantly; "they will worry my wife to death between them!"

"Then Theodora had better go home," said Percy, soberly.

"No, no; we can't do without her. She takes good care of Violet, and is very attentive and useful, and I can't have Violet left alone. If we could but get her down off her high horse, and drive that impudent woman out of her head! — if you can't, no one else can."

"It is very unfortunate," said Percy. "There is so much generous feeling and strong affection to prompt her resistance, that it is hard to oppose her, especially as I do believe there is no worse than folly and levity in this friend of hers. I wish these occasions would not arise. Left to herself these people would soon disgust her; but for her own sake we must interfere, and that keeps up her partisanship."

"What is to be done?" was Violet's disconsolate beginning, as soon as she could see Arthur alone.

"Take it easy" — words which she had taught herself to regard as a warning that she was doleful. "Never mind; if

Theodora is so pig-headed as to rush into this scheme, it is no concern of yours. All you have to do is to take care not to be worried."

Violet had regained a cheerful voice. "If you were going with her, it would not signify."

"It would signify pretty much to me to be bored with all that riff-raff. One would think Theodora bewitched."

"There is hardly any one of our acquaintance."

"No, the lady has dropped pretty much in the scale."

"I wish I knew what your father and mother would think of it."

"They would hate it as much as we do, but they could not prevent it. Nobody can stop Theodora when once she has the bit between her teeth. As I told Percy, if he can't, 't is past all power. I wonder if he thinks by this time he has caught a Tartar?"

"Did he call you to speak about it?"

"Yes; to say I must by no means let her go without a respectable female to look after her."

"I don't know these ladies; but if Mrs. Finch would ask Mrs. Bryanstone, she is so good-natured that I dare say she would go."

"That would be the most tolerable way of doing it; but I would lay you anything you please that nothing but unmitigated Finch will content her."

"And that is worse than no one?"

"I wish some stop could be put to it! It is worse than Percy knows. She can't speak to a man without flirting, and we shall have her turning some poor fellow's head like Wingfield's. I don't think it is respectable!"

"It is very strange, so good and religious as she is."

"Where is the use of her religion if it does not bring down her pride or cure her obstinacy? If it would, I should see some good in the rout she makes about going to church and teaching dirty children."

"Oh! Arthur, dear, don't say that."

"It is the truth, though."

"I think," said Violet, diffidently, "that some day the good will conquer the rest. Some day she will feel these things to be wrong and strive against them."

"Do you mean that she does not know it is wrong to be as wilful and proud as Lucifer?"

"I do not think she knows she has those tendencies."

Arthur laughed and shook his head. "One learns one's faults as one grows older, you know," continued Violet, "and she is so very kind. Think of her giving up all going out in the evening to stay with me, and you don't know how she waits on baby and me. She is so grand and noble, that kindness from her is delightful, and her face when it softens is so like you! Some book says that high natures have the most trouble with their faults."

"Then hers ought to be high indeed."

Violet began the day by telling Arthur that his sister would go to make arrangements with Mrs. Finch, and asked him to tell her of their decision before he returned to Windsor that morning.

"Our decision? What do you mean!"

"Don't you remember about Mrs. Bryanstone?"

"Oh! if that is to be done, you must say it. Ladies must manage their own visiting affairs. I don't understand chaperons and stuff."

"Arthur! you don't mean me to speak!"

"If it is to be done at all, it is woman's work, and I see no use in it. She will toss her head, and only be more resolved on her own way."

"Oh, Arthur! one moment? Did you not say it ought to be done?"

"Of course it ought, but it is of no use, and if you are wise, you will not tease yourself."

"But you said Percy insisted on it."

"So he did, but if he cannot tackle her himself, I am sure we can't. I'll have nothing to do with it — it is no affair of mine."

"Then am I to let her alone?"

"As you choose. I wish she would hear reason, but it is not worth bothering yourself for, when it is of no use."

"What do you wish me to do? I wish I knew —"

He shut the door behind him, and Violet tried to recover from her dismay. Thankful would she have been for commands not to interfere; but to be left to her own judgment was terrible, when she knew that his true opinion coincided with hers. How could she hope to prevail, or not to forfeit the much-prized affection that seemed almost reluctantly to be at last bestowed.

But, cost what it might, Violet never swerved from a duty, and her mind was clear that to permit Theodora to join the party alone, without remonstrance, and without the knowledge of her parents, would be improper. She resolved not to confuse herself with fears and anxieties, and strove to dwell on whatever could steady or calm her mind for the undertaking. How wide a difference in moral courage there was between that tall grenadier and his timid delicate wife.

Arthur and Theodora were both downstairs before her, and the latter was preparing breakfast, when there was a knock. "Percy!" she thought. "He shall see how useless it is to interfere!"

"Mr. Albert Moss!"

Arthur threw aside his newspaper, and held out his hand with a fair show of welcome. "Ha! Moss, how are you? Your sister will be down stairs directly. Miss Martindale —"

Theodora was resolved against being supercilious, but Mr. Moss's intention of shaking hands obliged her to assert her dignity by a princess-like inclination.

"Good morning," said Albert. "I came to town yesterday — slept at my uncle's — have this day in London — much occupied — thought myself sure of you at breakfast."

"I will tell Mrs. Martindale," said Theodora, glad to escape that she might freely uplift her eyes at his self-sufficiency, and let her pity for Arthur exhale safely on the stairs.

She met Violet, and was vexed at her start of joy, only consoling herself by thinking that she did not look as if she was his sister. Indeed, after the momentary instinct of gladness, came fears lest Arthur might not be pleased, and Theodora be annoyed; but the familiar home-like voice drove away all except pleasure as soon as she was certified that her husband's brow was smooth. His presence was a restraint, keeping Albert on his best behaviour, so that there was nothing to disturb her present enjoyment of home tidings. That good-humour and ease of his were indeed valuable ingredients of comfort.

He asked Albert to dinner, and desired him to bring Uncle Christopher, if they chose to be entertained by the ladies alone, further offering him a seat in his cab as far as their roads lay together. Highly gratified, Albert proceeded to ask his sister whether she was able to execute a commission for Matilda, the matching of a piece of chenille. Violet readily undertook it, and he said, "he would explain the occasion on his return."

When they were gone, the cares of the morning returned upon her, and by the time her household affairs were finished, all her pulses were throbbing at the prospect of the effort to which she was nerving herself. She ordered herself to be quiet, and lay down on the sofa, leaving the door open that Theodora might not go out without her knowledge.

"It is my duty!" repeated she to herself. "If I turn from it because it is so dreadful to me, I shall not take up my cross! If she will only listen and not be angry!"

Nearly an hour passed, the day seeming to grow warmer and more oppressive, and a nervous head-ache coming on. Poor Violet! she was still a frightened child, and when she saw Theodora coming down with her bonnet on, the fluttering of her heart made her call so feeble that Theodora supposed her ill, and came to her with kind solicitude that rendered it still harder to say what she knew would be taken as an affront.

With great difficulty she uttered the words, "I only wanted to speak to you about this expedition to Richmond."

"Well," said Theodora, smiling with what was meant for good-humour, but was only scorn, "you need not distress yourself, my dear, I am ready to hear."

"Would you get Mrs. Finch to ask Mrs. Bryanstone, and go with her?" Violet could really speak at no more length.

"It would be folly. Mrs. Bryanstone would be out of her element, and only a nuisanse to herself and every one else. That will do. You have discharged your conscience."

"It is not myself alone," said Violet, sitting up, and gathering force to speak firmly and collectedly, but with her hand on her heart. "Your brother and I both think it is not right, nor what Lord and Lady Martindale would approve, that you should join this party without some one they know and like."

"You mistake, Violet. This is not like a ball. There is no absurd conventionality, tacking a spinster to a married woman."

"No, but since Arthur cannot be with you, it is needful to take measures to prevent any awkwardness for you."

"Thank you. I 'll take care of that."

"Dear Theodora, I did not mean to vex you; but will you only put yourself in our place for one moment. Your father and mother let you stay here on the understanding that you go out with us, and when we cannot go, do you think we ought to see you put yourself under the escort of a person to whom we believe they would object?"

"I have told you that I know what my own father and mother permit."

Violet was silent, and pressed her hand on her brow, feeling as if all her prepared arguments and resolutions were chased away by the cool disregard which seemed to annihilate them even in her own eyes. By an effort, however, she cleared her mind, conjured back her steadiness, and spoke, preserving her voice with difficulty from being plaintive.

"You may know what they permit you, but we owe them duties too. Theodora, if you will not take some one with you whom we know they would approve, we must write and ask what Lord Martindale would wish."

"Arthur will never write," said Theodora, in defiance, but the answer took her by surprise — "if he does not, I shall."

"If there is to be such a rout, I will not go at all."

"Indeed I think it would be the best plan," said Violet, removing the hand that had been hiding the springing tears, to look up beseechingly, and see whether the project were resigned, and herself spared the letter which she well knew would be left to her lot.

But for those wistful eyes, Theodora would have felt caught in her own trap; for such speeches had often brought governess, mother, and even aunt to humble entreaties that she would take her own course. She had to recollect her words before she perceived that she had yielded, and that she must abide by them. Anything was better than the humiliation of Violet's sending home complaints of her conduct. She was greatly incensed; but a glance at the gentle, imploring face, and the hands trying in vain not to tremble with nervousness, could not but turn away her wrath. It was impossible to manifest displeasure; but to speak a word of concession seemed still more impossible. She impetuously threw off her bonnet, seized a pen, dashed off a few lines, and tossed the note and its envelope into Violet's lap, saying, in her low voice of proud submission, "There, you will send it," and left the room. Violet read

"My dear Georgina, — My brother is engaged at Windsor, and I cannot join your party to Richmond.

"Yours sincerely,

"Th. A. Martindale.

"Mrs. Martindale is pretty well, thank you."

Violet almost expected Theodora's next note would announce her return home. She had been forced to give up all

the affection so slowly gained, and to wound her proud sister-in-law where she was most sensitive. Should she hold Theodora to this renunciation, and send the note she had extorted, or should she once more ask whether this was in earnest, and beg her to reconsider the alternative?

But Violet was convinced that Theodora intended to hear no more about the matter, and that nothing would be such an offence as to be supposed to have acted hastily. She was afraid of renewing the subject, lest her weakness should lose her what she had gained. "Better," thought she, "that Theodora should think me presumptuous and troublesome than that she should mix herself up with these people, and perhaps displease Percy for ever. But, oh! if I could but have done it without vexing her, and to-day, too, when she has to bear with Albert."

Violet felt that she must give way to her head-ache, trusting that when it had had its will it might allow her to be bright enough to make a fair show before Albert. She lay with closed eyes, her ear not missing one tick of the clock, nor one sound in the street, but without any distinct impression conveyed to her thoughts, which were wandering in the green spots in the park at Wrangerton, or in John's descriptions of the coral reefs of the West Indies. The first interruption was Sarah's bringing down the baby, whom she was forced to dismiss at once.

Again all was still, but the half slumber was soon interrupted, something cold and fragrant was laid on her brow, and thinking Sarah would not be satisfied without attending to her, she murmured thanks, without opening her eyes; but the hand that changed the cool handkerchief was of softer texture, and looking up she saw Theodora bending over her, with the face so like Arthur's, and making every demonstration of kindness and attention, — drawing down blinds, administering sal volatile, and doing everything in her service.

Not that Theodora was in the least subdued. She was burning with resentment with every one — with Percy and

his prejudice; with the gossiping world; with her friends for making this a trial of power; with Arthur for having put forward his poor young wife when it cost her so much. "He knew I should not have given way to him! Feebleness is a tyrant to the strong. It was like putting the women and children on the battlements of a besieged city. It was cowardly, unkind to her, unfair on me. She is a witch."

But candour was obliged to acknowledge that it had not been feebleness that had been the conqueror; Violet had made no demonstration of going into fits, — it had been her resolution, her strength, not her weakness, that had gained the victory. Chafe as Theodora might, she could not rid herself of the consciousness that the sister of that underbred attorney, that timid, delicate, soft, shrinking being, so much her junior, had dared to grapple with her fixed determination, and had gained an absolute conquest. "Tyrant," thought Theodora, "my own brother would have left me alone, but she has made him let her interfere. She means to govern us all, and the show of right she had here has overthrown me for once; but it shall not happen again!"

At this juncture Theodora discovered from the sounds in the other room how much Violet had suffered from her effort, and her compassion was instantly excited. "I must go and nurse her. She meant to do right, and I honour the real goodness. I am no petted child to be cross because I have lost a pleasure."

So she took exemplary care of Violet, read aloud, warded off noises, bribed the brass band at the other side of the square, went up to see why Johnnie was crying, carried up her luncheon, waited on her assiduously, and succeeded so well, that by the time the carriage came round the head was in a condition to be mended by fresh air.

Mere driving out was one of Theodora's aversions. If she did not ride, she had district visiting and schooling; but to-day she went with Violet, because she thought her unfit to be tired by Matilda's commission. It proved no sinecure; the west end workshops had not the right article, and after

trying them, Theodora pronounced that Violet must drive about in the hot streets no longer. One turn in the park, and she would set her down, and go herself into the city, if necessary, to match the pattern.

And this from Theodora, who detested fancy work, despised what she called "dabblers in silk and wool," and hated the sight of a Berlin shop!

Violet would not have allowed it; but Theodora threw her determination into the scale, resolved to make herself feel generous and forgiving, and not above taking any trouble to save Violet. So off she set, and was gone so long that Violet had a long rest, and came down stairs, much revived, to welcome her brother.

Albert arrived alone. Uncle Christopher was engaged, and had charged him with his excuses, for which Violet was sorry, as he was an unpretending, sensible man, to whom she had trusted for keeping her brother in order; but Albert was of a different opinion. "No harm," he said. "It was very good-natured of Martindale; but he is a queer old chap, who might not go down so well in high life," and he surveyed his own elegant toilette.

"We get on very well," said Violet, quietly.

"Besides," added Albert, attempting bashfulness, "I have a piece of intelligence, which being slightly personal, I should prefer — you understand."

Violet was prepared by her sister's letters for the news that Albert was engaged to Miss Louisa Davis, very pretty, "higly accomplished," and an heiress, being the daughter of a considerable county banker, a match superior to what Albert could have expected. They had been engaged for the last fortnight, but he had not allowed his sisters to mention it, because he was coming to London, and wished to have the pleasure of himself communicating the intelligence. Violet was much flattered; she who used to be nobody to be thus selected! and she threw herself into all the home feelings. The wedding was fixed for the beginning of July, and this first made her remember the gulf between her and her family.

Seven o'clock was long past when Theodora entered, arrayed in rich blue silk and black lace, put on that Violet's brother might see she meant to do him honour; and so Violet understood it, but saw that he was only contrasting it with her own quiet-coloured muslin.

Here ended Violet's comfort. Albert was so much elated that she was afraid every moment of his doing something *mal-à-propos*. Theodora was resolved to be gracious, and make conversation, which so added to his self-satisfaction, that Violet's work was to repress his familiarity. At dinner, she made Theodora take Arthur's place, and called her Miss Martindale, otherwise she believed it would be Theodora the next moment with him, and thus she lost all appearance of ease. She was shy for her brother, and when he said anything she did not like, tried to colour it rightly; but she was weary and languid, and wanted spirit to control the conversation.

"So, Violet, Fanshawe's appointment was a pretty little bit of patronage of yours, but the ladies of Wrangerton will never forgive you. They were going to get up a subscription to give him a piece of plate."

"O, yes! and he desired them to send the money to the 'Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,'" said Violet. "Annette mentioned it."

"I suppose it depends on Mr. Martindale, whether he makes a good thing of it in Barbuda," said Albert; "but the gov—" at a dismayed look from her, he turned it into "My father is much obliged to you for getting him out of the way. The girls were so taken up with him one hardly knew whether something might not come of it; and really a poor curate — after the manner in which some of the family have connected themselves."

The ladies were sorry for each other; one ashamed and one amused, neither venturing to look up; and Albert had no opportunity for the bow he intended for Miss Martindale.

"By-the-bye," continued he, "who is this Fotheringham that was to settle with Fanshawe? I thought he was

Lord Martindale's solicitor, but my uncle knows nothing about him."

Violet coloured crimson, and wished herself under the table; Theodora made violent efforts to keep from an explosion of laughing.

"No," said Violet, rather indignantly; "he is — he is — he is —" she faltered, not knowing how to describe one so nearly a relation, "a great friend of —"

Theodora having strangled the laugh, came to her rescue, and replied with complete self-possession, "His sister, who died, was engaged to my eldest brother."

"Oh! I beg your pardon. You look on him as a sort of family connexion. I suppose, then, he is one of the Fotheringhams of Worthbourne? Matilda fancied he was the literary man of that name, but that could not be."

"Why not?" said Theodora, extremely diverted.

"A poet, an author! I beg your pardon; but a lady alone could suppose one of that description could be employed in a practical matter. Is not it Shakespeare who speaks of the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling? Eh, Violet? I shall never forget the gove — my father's indignation when he detected your humble servant in the act of attempting a slight tribute to the Muses. I believe the old gentleman looked on my fate as sealed."

"Albert!" said Violet, feeling as if she must stop his mouth, "you are quite mistaken. Mr. Fotheringham does belong to the family you mean, and he did write *The Track of the Crusaders*. He has been attached to the embassy in Turkey, and is waiting for another appointment." Then looking at Theodora, "You never told me how far you went to-day."

Theodora detailed her long pursuit of the chenille, and her successful discovery of it at last. Albert's gratitude was extreme; his sister would be delighted and flattered, the work would receive an additional value in the eyes of all, and he might well say so, he was a party concerned, the material was for a waistcoat, to be worn on an occasion — but his sister would explain.

Violet thought he had exposed himself quite enough; and as dessert was on the table, she rose with as good a smile as she could, saying, "Very well, I 'll explain; you will find your way to the drawing-room," and retreated.

Theodora caressingly drew her arm into hers, much pleased with her, and accepting her as entirely Martindale, and not at all Moss. "What! is he going to be married in it?"

"Yes, that is what he meant."

"I hope you are satisfied."

"O yes, I never saw her; but they are all very much pleased."

"Now tell me frankly, which do you like? Shall I leave you at peace with him, or will he think it rude in me?"

Violet decided in favour of Theodora's absence till tea-time. Alone she had enjoyed Albert, but the toil of watching his manners was too much.

"Then I 'll come down and make the tea."

"Thank you, dear Theodora. It is so kind. I hope it will not be very disagreeable. And one thing — could you tell him how well I really am, except for to-day's head-ache, or he will go and take home another bad account of me."

"Your head is worse again. There, I 'll fetch some lavender, and do you lie still and rest it till he comes."

He soon came.

"Well, Miss Martindale is a fine young lady, upon my word! Real high blood and no mistake. And not so high in her manner after all, when one knows how to deal with her."

"She is very kind to me."

"And how long does she stay?"

"O, for some time longer. Till August, most likely."

"Why, she will get the command of your house altogether."

"I am very glad to have her here."

"Ah!" said Albert, looking confidential, "you do right to be prudent, but you may trust me, and I should be glad to know that it is more comfortable than last year."

"It never was otherwise," said Violet.

"I hope so," said Albert, "I honour your prudence, and, after all, you have a handsome establishment, — capital dinners, good turn out. I only wish I could see you look in better spirits."

Violet started forward and coloured. "Albert, don't take up fancies. I am perfectly happy, and you must believe it. They all pet and spoil me with kindness. If you think me looking poorly to-day it is only from a head-ache, which Miss Martindale has been nursing so carefully and tenderly."

"Well, you cannot be too cautious if you are to stand well with the family. You do well to be on your guard. Martindale only the second son, and the elder may marry any day. That was one thing I thought I ought to speak to you about. You really should try to get some settlement made on you. You have nothing to depend upon, and, you see, you cannot expect anything from home."

"Do not talk about such things."

"You must not be childish, Violet; I am come as your best friend to give you advice. You ought to consider what would become of you if you were left with a family of young children, connected as you are. You depend entirely on one life, and you must not reckon on us, as you *must* see."

"I see;" said Violet, only wanting him to cease.

"Then you perceive I have your real interest in view when I tell you it is your duty to use what influence you have to get some provision made."

"Don't go on, Albert. As my marriage was brought about, it would be improper in me to do anything of the kind."

"I only wished you to see what you have to trust to. Ah! by-the-bye, there 's the old aunt. Have not you expectations from her?"

"No, she was so much offended at our marriage that there is no likelihood of her doing anything for us."

"Bless me! That 's a bad case! But you have been

staying there. Can't a pretty engaging thing like you manage to come round the old lady and get into her good graces?"

"Albert! don't talk so."

"Really, Violet, it is time to give up being a silly child. You ought not to throw away your true interests, or the time will come when you will be sorry, and remember what I said; but you are not to depend on me."

"No," said Violet, and scalding tears arose, "I do not. You need not be afraid. I have a brother who will take care of me and mine."

"John Martindale?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know your own ground. I thought it my duty to warn you, and I hope you will take care to make the most of yourself — it will never do to let yourself seem of no importance, and be overcrowed by this haughty young lady."

Violet nearly laughed, but the next speech was too much for her patience. "And you are satisfied at Martindale being so much from home?"

"He must be while his regiment is at Windsor;" and she rang for tea, and sent a message to summon Miss Martindale, feeling her presence her only protection.

Her head ached so much that she was obliged to lie on the sofa and let things take their chance, and Theodora's attempt to represent her in good health only appeared like blindness and indifference. Albert was much enchanted with Miss Martindale, and made himself more ridiculous, until it was a great satisfaction to his sister to see him depart.

"He always comes on unlucky days!" she said. "I wish I could have made it go off better. Thank you for taking all the trouble."

"No trouble at all," said Theodora, kindly. "I am sorry you had so much to tire you in the morning. Now, come up to your room. I wish I could carry you, as Arthur does."

She put her arm round her, helped her tenderly up the stairs, and came in several times to her room to see that she was comfortable. At the last good night, Violet whispered, "Dear Theodora, don't think my sisters like this — "

"I 'll judge them from you, my dear little sister."

"And you forgive me?"

"To be sure I do. You did as you thought right."

Strange to say Theodora had more sympathy for Violet after this awkward evening.

In the middle of the following day, Violet and little Johnnie were together in the drawing-room, when Arthur came in. "Well, how are you? I am only here for two hours, but I wanted to know how you are getting on."

"Very well, indeed, thank you."

"Theodora sticks to her flight of Finches, I suppose?"

"She has been so kind! she has given it up."

"You don't mean it. I thought she was ready to go through fire and water!" cried Arthur, incredulously.

"She has written to refuse."

"What, Percy brought her to reason?"

"No, he has not been here, but I suppose his opinion influenced her."

"What in the name of wonder prevailed? I never saw her turn when once she had taken up a notion."

"I believe it was that I said you or I must write to her father, and ask what he wished."

"So that settled her! Ha! Well done! Theodora forced to give up her will, and by you! Well, that is the best thing I have heard a long time. My little Violet to have got the upper hand of Miss Martindale!" and Arthur burst into such a fit of triumphant laughter as quite to discomfit Violet, but little Johnnie by her side on the sofa catching the infection of merriment, gave, what was very unusual with him, a regular shout of baby fun, and went on laughing in ecstasy that set Arthur off on a fresh score. "So! young man, you think it very funny that mamma has been too much for aunt Theodora?"

Theodora could not have chosen a more unlucky moment for walking into the room! However, it must remain uncertain whether she had heard. The visible consequence of the late affair was exemplary attention to Violet's comfort; and that doubt, so often balanced in her sister's mind, whether she loved Percy, now inclined to the affirmative, for there was a concealed disquietude at his totally absenting himself from Cadogan-place. They did not see him again till the very day of the pic-nic, when, as they were driving in the park, the exclamation — "There he is!" broke from her, and then she leant back, vexed at having betrayed her joy.

He came to speak to them with such an open beaming look of gratification as Violet trusted was a recompense, but Theodora chose to keep an unmoved countenance; and it was only Violet's happy congratulating face that assured him that all was right and the Richmond scheme resigned.

She asked him to dinner for that day, and he gladly accepted; but Theodora, considering it a sugar-plum to console her for staying at home, behaved as if it was a matter of indifference.

Violet took care to leave them alone, and she began the subject herself. "You find me here to-day, Percy, but it is no proof that I am convinced."

"It shows, as I hoped, that your good sense would prevail when left to itself."

"No, it was Violet."

"I honour her and you more than I ever did before."

"That 's your way," said Theodora, with the bright smile that was an act of oblivion for all her waywardness. "All you value is a slave with no will of her own."

"One who has a will, but knows how to resign it."

"That you may have the victory."

"No, but that you may be greater than he that taketh a city."

Theodora raised her eyes much softened. She never liked Percy so well as when he made these direct attacks on her

faults in general; when it came to a combat over the individual questions, it was a different matter.

"I am very glad you have given this up," Percy proceeded. "It is a positive relief to my mind to find that you *can* yield. Do not be ashamed of it, it is the best thing you have done a long time."

"But Percy, I did not do it on principle; I did it because Violet would have written to papa."

"There's the true sort of spirit! Brave enough to confront even *you* for the right, yet yielding her own will and wish at the first moment. I think more highly of Mrs. Martindale the more I hear of her."

"And you wish me to be like her?" said Theodora, watching for the blunt negative.

"No, but to see you what you might and ought to be. It is repeating what I told you when this first began. You have a noble nature, but you will not check yourself, will not control your pride, you cannot bear any attempt to curb you. You are proud of it; but I tell you, Theodora, it is not high spirit, it is absolute sinful temper. If no one else will tell you so, I must."

Theodora bent her head and cast down her eyes, not in sullenness, but in sorrow. "It is true," she murmured; "I see it sometimes, and it frightens me."

"I know," he said, much moved, "the sense of right must conquer; but, indeed, Theodora, it is time to begin, that it may not be some evil consequence that subdues you." He opened "the Baptistery" as it lay on the table, and pointed to the sentence — "If thou refusest the cross sent thee by an angel, the devil will impose on thee a heavier weight."

Theodora looked up in his face; the words were applied in a sense new to her. "Are humility and submission my cross?" said she.

"If you would only so regard them, you would find the secret of peace. If you would only tame yourself before

trouble is sent to tame you! But there, I have said what I felt it my duty to say; let us dwell on it no longer."

The large tears, however, fell so fast, that he could not bear to have caused them, and presently she said, "You are right, Percy, I am proud and violent. I have grown up fearfully untamed. No one ever checked me but you, and that is the reason I look up to you beyond all others."

The lioness was subdued, and the rest of the evening there was a gentleness and sober tone about her that made her truly charming: and a softer sense of happiness was around her when she awoke the next morning, making her feel convinced that this was indeed the only real peace and gladness.

CHAPTER XVII.

Call me false, or call me free,
Vow, whatever light may shine,
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change of mine.
E. B. Browning (The Lady's Yes).

It appeared as if Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner were offended at Theodora's defection, for nothing was heard of them for several days, and the household in Cadogan-place continued in a state of peacefulness. Arthur was again at home for a week, and Theodora was riding with him when she next met the two sisters, who at once attacked them for their absence from the pic-nic, giving an eager description of its delights and of the silence and melancholy of poor Lord St. Erme.

"He and Mark were both in utter despair," said Jane.

"Well, it is of no use to ask you; I have vowed I never will," said Mrs. Finch; "or I should try to make you come with us on Wednesday."

"What are you going to do?"

"You living in Captain Martindale's house, and forgetting the Derby!" And an entreaty ensued that both brother and sister would join their party. Arthur gave a gay, unmeaning answer, and they parted.

"What do you think of it?" asked Theodora.

"Too much trouble," said he, lazily. "There is no horse running that I take interest in. My racing days are over. I am an old domestic character."

"Nonsense! You don't look two-and-twenty! Lady Elizabeth's sister would not believe you were my married brother. You have not the look of it."

Arthur laughed, and said, "Absurd!" but was flattered.

When he told his wife of the invitation, he added, "I wonder if there is a fresh breeze blowing up!"

"I trust not."

"If she really wants to go, and she has never seen the thing, I had rather take her in a sober way by ourselves, and come home at our own time."

"Why don't you? It would be very pleasant for you both, and I should be so glad. Think how she shuts herself up with me!"

"We will see. Anything for a quiet life."

Theodora, being fond of horses, and used to hear much about them from her brother, had a real curiosity to go to Epsom, and broached the subject the next morning at breakfast. Before any answer had been given, Mr. Fotheringham made his appearance.

"Well, Percy," said Arthur, "you find this sister of mine bent on dragging me to Epsom. Come with us! You will have an opportunity of getting up an article against fashionable life."

Theodora was ready to hide her desire for his consent, but thought better of it, and said, "It is of no use to ask him."

"Indeed I would go," said Percy; "I wish I could; but I came here to tell you that my aunt Fotheringham is coming to London early on Wednesday for advice for her son, and will only be there two days, so that it is impossible to be away."

"Is Sir Antony Fotheringham coming?" asked Violet, as Theodora did not speak.

"No, he is a fixture. He has never even seen a rail-road. My aunt could hardly persuade him to let her come up without the old chariot and posters."

"You will bring them here to dinner," said Arthur.

"Thank you, I must not promise; I cannot tell what Pelham may be fit for. I must take him to the Zoological Gardens. How he will enjoy them, poor fellow! The only thing to guard against will be his growing too much excited."

Percy was engaged that morning, and soon departed, with hardly a word from Theodora, whose amiability had been entirely overthrown by finding her service postponed to that of his aunt.

"There 's the Derby happily disposed of!" said Arthur, rising from the breakfast-table.

"I don't see why," said Theodora.

"What! Is not this Percy's well-beloved aunt, who nursed Helen, and is such a friend of John's?"

"I am not going to dance attendance on any one."

"It is your concern," said Arthur; "but, if you don't take care, Percy won't stand much more of this."

Vouchsafing no answer, she quitted the room. Arthur made a gesture of annoyance. "She treats Percy like a dog!" he said. "I believe my aunt is right, and that it never will come to good!"

"Shall you go with her, then?"

"I must, I suppose. She will not let me off now."

"If we do not vex her by refusing, I hope she will give it up of herself. I am almost sure she will, if no one says anything about it."

"Very well: I am the last person to begin. I am sick of her quarrels."

Two wills were dividing Theodora; one calling on her to renounce her pride and obstinacy, take up the yoke while yet there was time, earn the precious sense of peace, and confer gladness on the honest heart which she had so often pained. Violet was as the genius of this better mind, and

her very presence infused such thoughts as these, disposing her not indeed openly to yield, but to allow it to drop in silence.

But there was another will, which reminded her that she had thrice been baffled, and that she had heard the soft tyrant rejoicing with her brother over her defeat! She thought of Violet so subjugating Arthur, that he had not even dared to wish for his favourite amusement, as if he could not be trusted! Such recollections provoked her to show that there was one whose determination would yield to no one's caprice, and impelled her to maintain the unconquerable spirit in which she had hitherto gloried. Violet's unexpressed opinion was tricked out as an object of defiance; and if she represented the genius of meekness, wilfulness was not without outward prompters.

Mrs. Finch and Miss Gardner called, and found her alone. "There!" said the former, "am I not very forgiving? Actually to come and seek you out again, after the way you served us. Now, on your honour! what was the meaning of it?"

"The meaning was, that this poor child had been told it was etiquette for me to have a chaperon at my heels, and made such a disturbance that I was obliged to give up the point. I am not ashamed. She is a good girl, though a troublesome one at times."

"Who would have thought that pretty face could be so prudish?"

"I suppose she is against your coming to Epsom?" said Jane, interrupting her sister.

"No; my brother and I have been proposing to go, independently; so as to be able to come home at our own time."

"You had better be satisfied with that, Georgina," said Jane. "We shall find ourselves together at the stand, and it will spare a few dangerous hysterics."

"I shall do nothing underhand," said Theodora. "I shall proclaim my intention of joining you, but I doubt, because Lady Fotheringham is coming to London."

"Her ladyship herself?" cried Georgina. "What, in the name of wonder, brings her from her antediluvian hall?"

"She brings her son for advice."

"We can say no more," said Jane. "Percy's expectations would be ruined if the good lady found his intended concerned in such naughty doings. She must stay at home."

"To entertain Pelham," cried Mrs. Finch, in a paroxysm of laughing, of her most unreal kind.

"Let me give you one piece of advice," said Jane. "Don't make yourself too great a favourite, as I unwittingly did, or you will have no cessation of 'I have a pony; it can trot; it can canter.'"

"I have not decided."

"No," said Jane, "you cannot do it. We know Lady Fotheringham too well to ask you to lose your place in her regard for our sake. Probably this is a most important visit, and all may depend on her first impressions."

"I don't depend on her."

"Ah! you don't understand. She is the managing partner, and I have little doubt this is only an excuse for coming to inspect you. It is quite in their power, you know, to do the only rational thing under the circumstances, make an eldest son of Percy, and set poor Pelham aside, with enough to make him happy."

"I do believe that must be it," cried Georgina. "She would be a dear old woman if she would only do it!"

"And you see it would be fatal for Theodora to appear as a fashionable young lady, given to races, and the like vanities."

"I shall seem nothing but what I am."

"She would find Mrs. Martindale sighing at her inability to keep you out of bad company. So sorry to trust you with us. She did her utmost. No, no, Theodora, you must stay at home, and the good lady will be charmed."

"I do not intend to be turned from my course."

"No! Now Jane, you should not have spoken in that

way," said her sister. "You will only make Theodora more resolved to come with us; and, indeed, I had rather she did not, if it is to do her any harm."

"I shall leave you to settle it between you," said Jane, with apparent carelessness. "I shall go home to appease for a little while the unfortunate dressmaker, whom we are keeping so long waiting. Make the most of Theodora, while you can have her."

She would not have gone, had she not believed her work done.

"I have made up my mind," said Theodora, as the door closed.

"Theodora! I do beg you will not," cried Georgina, in an agitated voice, fully meaning all she said. "You will vex and displease them all. I know you will, and I could not bear that! Your happiness is not wasted yet! Go, and be happy with your Percy!"

"I have told Percy of my intentions. Do you think I would alter them for this notion of Jane's?"

"That is my own dear Theodora! But it is not only that. They are such good people — so kind! You must not risk their good opinion, for they would be so fond of you!"

"If their good opinion depends on narrow-minded prejudice, I do not wish for it."

"If she would but come a day later," said Georgina; "for I do want you to be with me very much, Theodora! I know I shall meet with nothing but mortification, if you are not. People will only make that little starched bow! And Mr. Finch has noticed your not being so much with me. But no, no, you shall not come. You shall stay and see dear, good old Lady Fotheringham! Oh! how I wish I could!" and her breast heaved with a suppressed sob.

"Why do you not, then, dear Georgina? Let me tell her your feeling, and —"

"No, no, no, no! I can never see her again! Don't talk to me about her! She belongs to another state of existence."

"This will not do, Georgina. It is vain to turn aside now from what will and must come on you some day."

"Don't! don't, Theodora!" said she, petulantly. "Everything goes against me! There 's Jane taken to lecturing, and even Mr. Finch is growing crabbed, and declares he shall take me to vegetate in this horrid place he has bought in the country."

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Theodora. "Now then, there is a chance for you. If you will throw yourself into the duties and pursuits —"

"What! be squiress and Lady Bountiful; doctor old women, and lecture school children? No, no, that may do for you, but I am at least no hypocrite!"

"I should be a great hypocrite, if I did not believe the old women and the children far better than myself," said Theodora, gravely. "But, indeed, trying to make them comfortable would occupy your mind, and interest you till — oh! if it would but help you on the only way to happiness —"

"Don't talk of that word any more with me."

"If not happiness, it would be peace."

"Peace! I don't know what you mean."

"If you watched my sister, you would."

"She is happy!" said Mrs. Finch, in a tone of keen regret, laying her hand on a toy of Johnnie's; but instantly changing her note, "A cold, inanimate piece of wax! That is what you call peace! I would not have it."

"You don't understand her —"

"I know one thing!" cried the fitful lady, vehemently; "that it is she who governs you all, and wants to divide you from me. 'T is she and your Percy who have robbed me of you, with their ill-natured stories."

"There is no ill-nature in them, and no one governs me," said Theodora.

"Then you hold fast by me, and come with me?"

"I do."

"My thorough-going old Theodora! I knew they could

not spoil you, say what they would!" for she was by no means insensible of the triumph.

"But, Georgina," continued her friend, earnestly, "you must be prudent. Let me speak to you for once."

"Only don't talk of prudence. I am sick of that from Jane."

"Yes! it is speaking on this world's grounds; I will speak of higher motives. Think what is to come by-and-bye: there are things that cannot be kept off by being forgotten. You are weary and dissatisfied as it is; try whether boldly facing the thoughts you dread might not lead to better things. There will be pain at first; but content will come, and —"

"If you will come and stay with me in the country, you shall teach me all your ways. But no; it would put all the Fotheringhams in commotion! If I had a happy home I might be good! You must not quite forsake me, Theodora. But here 's Mrs. Martindale!"

Violet entering, Mrs. Finch greeted her in a subdued manner, and, indeed, looked so dejected that when she was gone, Violet asked if she was well.

"Yes, poor thing; it is only the taste of the ashes she eats instead of bread. But I have had her alone, and have got her to hear some grave talk!"

"Oh, how glad I am!"

"But I cannot give up meeting her at Epsom. She would feel it a desertion, and my influence is the best hope for her. Besides, I will not sacrifice her to curry favour with the Worthbourne people."

"Surely it would not be doing so!"

"I have made up my mind."

Her better and worse feelings were alike enlisted in behalf of the expedition. Sincerity, constancy, and generosity were all drawn in to espouse the cause of pride and self-will; and she never once recollected that the way to rescue her friend from the vortex of dissipation was not to follow her into it!

Little was needed to rouse in Arthur the dormant taste so

long the prevalent one. So eager was he when once stirred up, that his sister almost doubted whether she might not be leading him into temptation; as she remembered the warning against Mr. Gardner; but she repelled the notion of his being now liable to be led away, and satisfied herself by recollecting that whenever he had met his former schoolfellow, he had shown no disposition to renew the acquaintance.

All the notice of Percy that she chose to take, was, that on the Tuesday evening, she said, as she wished Violet good night, "If Percy should call with his aunt to-morrow, which I don't expect, you will explain, and say I hope to call early next day."

"Well! I hope you will get into no scrape," said Arthur; "but mind, whatever comes of it, 't is your doing, not mine."

Words which she answered with a haughty smile, but which she was never to forget.

Violet saw the brother and sister depart, and could only hope that nothing might be heard of the Fotheringham party; but before half the morning had passed, the knock, for the first time unwelcome, sounded at the door, and there entered not only Percy, but an elderly lady who might have been supposed the grandmother, rather than the mother, of the tall comely youth who bashfully followed her.

Violet strove, by the warmth of her reception, to make up for what was wanting; but her sentences were broken and confused; she was glad and she was sorry, and they would be very sorry, and something about not expecting and calling early, was all mixed together, while she watched with deprecating looks the effect upon Percy.

"Is she gone?" he asked, in a low stern voice.

"Yes; but she told me to say, in case — we hardly thought it likely — but in case Lady Fotheringham should be kind enough to call, she told me to say she will certainly call early to-morrow."

Violet knew she had made a most tangled speech, and

that there was great danger that her trembling sorrowful voice should convey to Lady Fotheringham an impression that there was something amiss; but she could only try to make the intelligence as little mortifying as possible.

The fact was enough. Percy stood in the window in silence, while his aunt, on learning where Miss Martindale was, good-naturedly supposed it had long been settled, and said it must be such a pleasure to the brother and sister to go together, that she should have been grieved if it had been prevented.

Violet spoke of the call to be made to-morrow; but Lady Fotheringham seemed to have so little time free that it was not probable she would be at home. Uneasy at Percy's silence, Violet did not prosper in her attempts at keeping up the conversation, until Percy, suddenly coming forward, begged that "the boy" might be sent for; his aunt must see John's godson. It was chiefly for his own solace, for he carried the little fellow back to his window, and played with him there till luncheon time, while the ladies talked of Mr. Martindale.

Violet won her visitor's heart by her kind manner to the poor son, who was very well trained, and behaved like an automaton, but grew restless with the hopes of wild beasts and London shops. His mother was about to take leave, when Percy proposed to take charge of him, and leave her to rest for the afternoon with Mrs. Martindale, a plan very acceptable to all parties.

Lady Fotheringham was a woman of many sorrows. Her husband was very feeble and infirm, and of a large family, the youngest, this half-witted son, was the only survivor. Grief and anxiety had left deep traces on her worn face, and had turned her hair to a snowy whiteness; her frame was fragile, and the melancholy kindness of her voice deeply touched Violet. There was much talk of John, for whom Lady Fotheringham had a sort of compassionate reverence, derived from his patient resignation during Helen's illness,

of which Violet now gathered many more particulars, such as added to her affection and enthusiasm for both.

Of her nephew, Percival, Lady Fotheringham spoke in the highest terms, and dwelt with pleasure on the engagement still connecting him with the Martindale family. Violet was glad to be able to speak from her heart of Theodora's excellence and kindness.

By and by, her visitor, in a sad voice, began to inquire whether she ever saw "a young connexion of theirs, Mrs. Finch;" and as Violet replied, said she was anxious to hear something of her, though she feared it was a painful subject. "I cannot help being interested for her," she said. "She was a very fine girl, and had many good dispositions; but I fear she was very ill managed. We grew very fond of her, when she was at Worthbourne, poor thing, and if we and that excellent elder sister could have kept her to ourselves, we might have hoped — But it was very natural that she should grow tired of us, and there was much excuse for her —"

"Indeed there was, from all Theodora has told me."

"I am glad to hear Miss Martindale keeps up her friendship. While that is the case, I am sure there is nothing positively wrong, though imprudent I fear she must be."

Violet eagerly explained how every one was fully satisfied that, though Mrs. Finch was too free and dashing in manner, and too fond of attracting notice, there was principle and rectitude at the bottom, and that her life of dissipation was chiefly caused by the tedium of her home. All attachment between her and Mark Gardner had evidently died away; and though it might have been wiser to keep him at a distance, she had some good motives for allowing him to be often at her house.

Lady Fotheringham was relieved to hear this, and added that she might have trusted to Jane. Violet was surprised to find that Miss Gardner held a very high place in Lady Fotheringham's esteem, and was supposed by her to take most watchful, motherly care of her headstrong younger

sister. She had made herself extremely agreeable at Worthbourne, and had corresponded with Lady Fotheringham ever since; and now Violet heard that Jane had thought the marriage with Mr. Finch a great risk, and would willingly have dissuaded her sister from it; but that Georgina had been bent upon it! "thinking, no doubt, poor girl, that riches and gaiety would make her happy! I wish we could have made it pleasanter to her at Worthbourne!"

"She has spoken very affectionately of you."

"Ah, poor child! she had met with little kindness before. She used to pour out her griefs to me. It was that wretched Mark who broke her heart, and after that she seemed not to care what became of her. But I am a little comforted by your account. I will try to see her to-morrow, poor dear. Percy was hoping I should be able, though I think that he is quite right not to visit them himself."

Violet agreed to all, and was pleased at the notion of the good old lady's influence being tried on one evidently amenable to right impressions. As far as she herself was concerned, the visit was very gratifying, and when the leave-taking came, it seemed as if they had been intimate for years.

Violet sat pondering whether the dulness of Worthbourne, and the disappointment of her first love had been the appointed cross of Georgina Gardner, cast aside in impatience of its weight. And then she tried to reconcile the conflicting accounts of Jane's influence in the matter, till she thought she was growing uncharitable; and after having tried in vain to measure the extent of Percy's annoyance, she looked from the window to see if carriages seemed to be returning from Epsom, and then with a sigh betook herself to the book Theodora had provided for her solitude.

She had long to wait. Arthur and his sister came home later than she had expected, and did not bring the regale of amusing description that they had promised her.

Arthur was silent and discontented, and went to his smoking room. Theodora only said it had been very hot,

and for the first time really looked tired, and owned that she was so. It had been hard work, first to draw Arthur into Mrs. Finch's party, against which he exerted all his lazy good-humoured *vis inertiæ* — undertaking to show her everything and explain all to her, be at her service all the day, if only she would keep away from them and their nonsense. But when their carriage was found, and Arthur was dragged into the midst of them, a still harder task arose. She was frightened to see Mark Gardner conversing with him, while he looked eager and excited, and she hastened to interrupt, put forth every power of attraction, in the resolve entirely to monopolize Mr. Gardner; and for a long time, at the expense of severe exertion in talking nonsense, she succeeded. But some interruption occurred; she missed Mr. Gardner, she missed Arthur; they were waited for; she wondered and fretted herself in vain, and at length beheld them returning in company — heard Mrs. Finch gaily scolding them, and understood that there had been bets passing!

She called it fatigue, but it was rather blank dread, and the sense that she had put herself and others in the way of evil.

It was possible that Arthur might have been only a spectator; or, if not, that he might have known where to stop. He had bought his experience long ago, at high cost; but Theodora was but too well aware of his unsteadiness of purpose and facile temper; and in spite of his resolutions, it was a fearful thing to have seen him in such a place, in such company, and to know that almost against his own desire she had conducted him thither for the gratification of her self-will.

Vainly did she strive to banish the thought, and to re-assure herself by his manner. She knew too well what it was wont to be when he had been doing anything of which he was ashamed.

One bet, however, was no great mischief in itself.

That book which Percy had given to her spoke of "threads turning to cords, and cords to cables strong." Had

she put the first thread once more into the hand of the "Old Evil Habit?"

If she would confess the sin to herself and to her God, with earnest prayer that the ill might be averted, perhaps, even yet, it might be spared to them all.

But the proud spirit declared there was no sin. She had merely been resolute and truthful. So she strengthened herself in her belief in her own blamelessness, and drove down the misgiving to prey on the depths of her soul, and sharpen her temper by secret suffering.

In the morning she accompanied Violet to call on Lady Fotheringham, sullen, proud, and bashful at the sense of undergoing inspection, and resolved against showing her best side, lest she should feel as if she was winning Worthbourne for Percy.

That majestic ill-humour was wasted — Lady Fotheringham was not at home; but Violet left a note begging her to come to luncheon the next day. It passed, and she appeared not: but at twelve on Saturday, Percy's tread hurried up stairs and entered the back drawing-room, where Theodora was sitting.

Sounds of voices followed — the buzz of expostulation; tones louder and louder — words so distinct that to prevent her anxious ears from listening, Violet began to practise Johnnie in all his cries of birds and beasts.

All at once the other room door was opened, and Theodora's stately march was heard, while one of the folding leaves was thrown back, and there stood Percy.

Before a word could be spoken, he snatched up the child, and held him up in the air to the full reach of his arms. Doubtful whether this was to be regarded as play, Johnnie uttered "Mamma" in a grave imploring voice, which, together with her terrified face, recalled Mr. Fotheringham to his senses. With an agitated laugh he placed the boy safely beside her, saying, "I beg your pardon. What a good little fellow it is!"

Violet asked him to ring for the nurse; and by the time

Johnnie had been carried away, he had collected himself sufficiently to try to speak calmly.

"Do her parents know what is going on?" he said. "I do not speak for my own sake. That is at an end."

"Oh!" exclaimed Violet.

"I told her I could not be made a fool of any longer, and when she answered 'very well,' what could that mean?"

"I am very much grieved that it has come to this," sighed Violet.

"How could it come to anything else?" he said, his face full of sorrow and severity. "I was mad to suppose there was any hope for such a temper of pride and stubbornness. Yet," he added, softening, and his quick stern eyes filling with tears, "it is a noble nature, — high-minded, uncompromising, deeply tender, capable of anything. It has been a cruel, wicked thing, to have ruined all by education. What could come of it? A life of struggles with women who had no notion of an appeal to principle and affection — growing up with nothing worthy of her love and respect — her very generosity becoming a stumbling-block, till her pride and waywardness have come to such an indomitable pitch that they are devouring all that was excellent."

He paused; Violet, confused and sorrowful, knew not how to answer; and he proceeded, "I have known her, watched her, loved her from infancy! I never saw one approaching her in fine qualities. I thought, and still think, she needs but one conquest to rise above all other women. I believed guidance and affection would teach her all she needed; and so they would, but it was presumption and folly to think it was I who could inspire them."

"O Mr. Fotheringham, indeed —"

"It was absurd to suppose that she who trifles with every one would not do so with me. Yet, even now, I cannot believe her capable of carrying trifling to the extent she has done."

"She was in earnest, — Oh! she was!"

"I would fain think so," said he, sadly. "I held to that

trust, in spite of the evidence of my senses. I persuaded myself that her manners were the effect of habit — the triumph of one pre-eminent in attraction."

"That they are! I don't even think she knows what she does."

"So I believed; I allowed for her pleasure in teasing me. I knew all that would come right. I ascribed her determination to run after that woman to a generous reluctance to desert a friend."

"Indeed, indeed it is so!"

"But how am I to understand her neglect of my aunt — the one relation whom I have tried to teach her to value — my aunt, who was the comfort of my sister and of her brother — who had suffered enough to give her a claim to every one's veneration! To run away from her to the races, and the society of Mark Gardner and Mrs. Finch! Ay! and what do you think we heard yesterday of her doings there, from Gardner's own mother! That she is giving him decided encouragement! That was the general remark; and on this, poor Mrs. George Gardner is founding hopes of her son settling down and becoming respectable."

"Oh! how terrible for you to hear! But it cannot be true. It must be mere report. Arthur would have observed if there had been more than her usual manner."

"A pretty manner to be usual! Besides, Jane Gardner did not deny it?"

"Jane Gardner!"

"Yes. My aunt called at Mrs. Finch's, but saw neither of them, but this morning before she went, Miss Gardner called. I did not see her. I was out with Pelham, and my aunt spoke to her about all this matter. She answered very sensibly, regretted her sister's giddy ways, but consoled my aunt a good deal on that score; but — but as to the other, she could not say, but that Mark was a great admirer of — of Miss Martindale, and much had passed which might be taken for encouragement on Wednesday by any one who did not know how often it was her way!"

"It is a pity that Miss Gardner has had to do with it," said Violet. "When I have been talking to her, I always am left with a worse impression of people than they deserve."

"You never have a bad impression of any one."

"I think I have of Miss Gardner. I used to like her very much, but lately I am afraid I cannot believe her sincere."

"You have been taught to see her with Theodora's eyes! Of course, Mrs. Finch despises and contemns prudence and restraint, and the elder sister's advice is thrown aside."

"You never saw Jane Gardner?"

"Never; — but that is not the point here. I am not acting on Jane Gardner's report. I should never trouble myself to be jealous of such a scoundrel as Mark. I am not imagining that there is any fear of her accepting him. Though, if such a notion once possessed her, nothing would hinder her from rushing on inevitable misery."

"Oh! there is no danger of that!"

"I trust not. It would be too frightful! However, I can look on her henceforth only as John's sister, as my little playmate, as one in whom hopes of untold happiness were bound up." He struggled with strong emotion, but recovering, said, "It is over! The reason we part is independent of any Gardner. She would not bear with what I thought it my duty to say. It is plain I was completely mistaken in thinking we could go through life together. Even if there was reason to suppose her attached to me, it would be wrong to put myself in collision with such a temper. I told her so, and there is an end of the matter."

"It is very, very sad," said Violet, mournfully.

"You don't think I have used her ill."

"Oh no! You have borne a great deal. You could do no otherwise; but Arthur and John will be very much vexed."

"It is well that it is known to so few. Let it be understood by such as are aware of what has been, that I bear the onus of the rupture. No more need be known than that the

break was on my side. We both were mistaken. She will not be blamed, and some day" — but he could not speak calmly — "she will meet one who will feel for her as I do, and will work a cure of all these foibles. You will see the glorious creature she can be."

"The good will conquer at last," said Violet, through her tears.

"I am convinced of it, but I fear it must be through much trial and sorrow. May it only not come through that man!"

"No, no!"

"Then good bye."

They shook hands with lingering regret, as if unwilling to resign their relationship. "You will explain this to Arthur, and give him my thanks for his friendliness; and you — accept my very best thanks for your great kindness and sympathy. If she had known you earlier — But good bye. Only if I might venture to say one thing more — you and Arthur will not give me up as a friend, will you?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Violet, as well as her tears would permit, "I am sure we are but too glad —"

He pressed her hand gratefully, and was gone; while overwhelmed with the agitation she sank weeping on the sofa, only conscious that they all were in some sort guilty of a great injury to Mr. Fotheringham. In this state of distress she was found by Theodora, who came down, so lofty and composed, that no one could have divined who was the party chiefly concerned in what had taken place.

Without comment, she treated Violet as for a nervous attack, taking great care of her till the sobs subsided, and there only remained a head-ache which kept her on the sofa for the rest of the day. Theodora read aloud, but which of them marked the words? Late in the afternoon, she put down the book, and wrote a note, while Violet silently marvelled at the unconcern of her countenance.

"There, I shall take it to the post. You may read it if you like, while I put on my bonnet."

Violet read.

"My dear Mamma, — Our engagement is at an end. Mr. Fotheringham tried to exercise a control over my actions to which I could not submit; and in especial, was affronted by my going to Epsom with Arthur, instead of staying at home for the chance of seeing Lady Fotheringham. We came to high words, perceived the error of thinking our tempers accorded, and agreed to part. I have no cause of complaint, though I am at this moment much displeased with him; for when he had done with me, he went and stormed to poor Violet till he brought on one of her hysterical affections. No one can have acted with kinder or more conscientious intentions than she has done throughout the affair. I do not mean to come away till after her confinement. London is wide enough for him and for me; and I would not leave her on any account.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"Theodora A. Martindale."

Violet glowed with indignation at such mention of Percy. "She never loved him! It is as John thought!"

Theodora, returning, took the note, and began to put it into its envelope without a word.

"Thank you," said Violet; "it is very kind in you to stay with me. It is a great comfort to Arthur."

"Is it no comfort to you?" said Theodora. "If I am in your way, I will go."

"Oh! what should I do without you? It makes such a difference to me. I rely upon you to take care of Arthur, and Johnnie, and everything. Only don't do what is not pleasant to you."

"I wish to live to be useful. I had rather be useful to you and Arthur than to any one. If you will keep me, I stay."

All the rest of the day Violet could only feel that she could not be displeased with one so devoted to her. She wondered what Arthur would say. His comment was —

"Well, I always expected it. It is a pity! She has thrown away her only chance of being a reasonable woman."

"You saw no cause for that horrid report?"

"Not a bit. She is not so frantic as that comes to. She went on in her old way, only a little stronger than usual; but Percy was quite right not to stand it, and so I shall tell her."

However, Theodora kept him from the subject by the force of her imperturbability, and he could only declaim against her to his wife.

"I don't believe she cared a farthing for him."

"I almost fear not. Yet, how could she accept him?"

"He was the biggest fish that had ever come to her bait. She could not have played her pranks on him without hooking him; but he has broken the line, and it serves her right. I only wish she took it to heart! It is a lucky escape for him. What will his lordship think of it?"

Lord Martindale wrote, evidently in much annoyance, to desire Arthur to send him a full history of the transaction, and, after much grumbling, he was obeyed. What he said to his daughter did not transpire; but Violet gathered that the opinion at Martindale was, that she had not age or authority sufficient for the care of the young lady. In this she fully acquiesced, and, indeed, had some trouble in silencing repining speculations on what might have happened if she had been older, or in stronger health, or more judicious.

It was a universal failure, and she felt as if they were all to blame, while it terrified her to recollect John's predictions as to the effect on Theodora's disposition.

Another question was, how Mrs. Finch would feel on the matter. Theodora had written to her, and received one of her warm impulsive answers, as inconsistent as her whole nature; in one place in despair that her friend's happiness had been sacrificed — in another, rejoicing in her freedom from such intolerable tyranny, and declaring that she was the noblest creature and the naughtiest, and that she must see her at once.

But she never came, and when Theodora called was not at home. Violet had Jane to herself for an unpleasing hour

of condolence and congratulation, regrets and insinuations, ending with the by-no-means unwelcome news that Mr. Finch was tired of London, and they were going into the country — and not Mark — going to set off in a week's time. Two more calls failed, and Theodora only received a note, in which Mrs. Finch declared herself *abimée*, *désolée* that her husband would drag her off into the country at such short notice, that her world of engagements had hindered her from meeting her best of friends. Then, with a sudden transition to slang, she promised excellent fun in riding, boating, &c., if Theodora would come to see her, and plenty of admirers ready to have their heads turned, ending rather piteously with "Who knows but I might take a turn for good? I know I wish I could, if it was not so horridly tiresome. You won't forget your poor G. F."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Oh! woman is a tender tree,
The hand must gentle be that rears,
Through storm and sunshine, patiently,
That plant of grace, of smiles and tears.
A. CLEVELAND COX.

THE height of the season was over, and London was beginning to thin. Lady Elizabeth Brandon had accepted invitations for a round of visits to her friends and relations, and Violet thought with regret how little she had seen of her and Emma.

In fact, that unfortunate party at Mrs. Bryanstone's had been a sacrifice of the high esteem in which she had once been held. Emma, with the harshness of youthful judgments, could not overlook the folly that had hazarded so much for the sake of gaiety; and was the more pained because of the enthusiasm she had once felt for her, when she had believed her superior to all the world. She recollected her love-at-first-sight for the pretty bride, and well nigh regarded the friendship as a romance of her girlhood. She did not blame poor Violet, for no more could have been expected than that

so simple a girl would be spoiled by admiration, and by such a husband. She should always be interested in her, but there could be no sympathy for deeper visions and higher subjects in one devoted to the ordinary frivolities of life. Violet owned she could not understand her; what could be more true?

So Emma betook herself more and more to her other friend, lamented over present evils, made visionary amendments and erected dreamy worlds of perfection, till she condemned and scorned all that did not accord with them.

Lady Elizabeth would rather have seen her daughter intimate with Violet. Mistaken though that party was, it was hard measure, she thought, utterly to condemn a girl hardly eighteen. She could understand Violet — she could not understand Miss Marstone; and the ruling domineering nature that laid down the law frightened her. She found herself set aside for old-fashioned notions whenever she hinted at any want of judgment or of charity in the views of the friends; she could no longer feel the perfect consciousness of oneness of mind and sufficiency for each other's comfort that had been such happiness between her and her daughter; and yet everything in Theresa Marstone was so excellent, her labours among the poor so devoted, and her religion so evidently heartfelt, that it was impossible to consider the friendship as otherwise than an honour to Emma.

Lady Elizabeth could only feel that she should be more at ease when she was not always in dread of interrupting a *tête-à-tête*, and when there was no longer any need to force Emma into society, and see her put on that resigned countenance which expressed that it was all filial duty to a mother who knew no better. Moreover, Lady Elizabeth hoped for a cessation of the schemes for the Priory, which were so extravagant as to make her dread Emma's five-and-twentieth year.

Desirous as she was of leaving London, she would not

consent to go to her brother in the end of June, until she had certified herself that Violet did not wish for her attendance.

Violet *did* think that it would have been a great comfort, but perceived that it would be at some inconvenience; and further divined that to be extremely useful and important was Theodora's ruling desire. She was afraid of heart-burnings, and, as usual, yielded her own wishes, begged Lady Elizabeth not to disturb her plans, made many declarations of Theodora's kindness and attention; and in return, poor thing! was judged by Emma to be in dread of lectures!

So the Brandons left London, and Violet sighed over the disappointment their stay had been — knew she had given up the chance of a renewal of intimacy, and thought Emma's estrangement all her own fault.

Arthur, likewise, had a fit of restlessness. Some of his friends were intending to go grouse shooting to Scotland, and it was evident that he was desirous of joining them if Violet could only recover in time to spare him. Theodora also wished that he should go, for she had a strong suspicion that he was gliding fast into frequent intercourse with Mr. Gardner, and hoped that absence would put a stop to it.

Not a word, not a look, ever referred to Mr. Fotheringham. Violet thought it inexplicable, and could only suppose that Theodora had been under some delusion, and had never known the meaning of love, for there was nothing like sorrow or disappointment; she almost seemed to be glad of her release.

It was a trial when the Review was published, containing the critique upon modern poetry. For a whole day it was left unopened, because neither sister liked to touch it in the presence of the other; but when, in the morning, Violet took it to read, she found the leaves cut. Lord St. Erme had been treated with some censure, but with a fair amount of praise; and her own favourite pieces were selected for commendation, but there was sufficient satire and severity

to cause the universal remark that it was hard on poor Lord St. Erme.

Often was the observation made, for the article excited much attention — it was so striking and able, keenly and drolly attacking absurdity and affectation, good-humoured and lively, and its praise so cordial and enthusiastic. Every visitor was sure to begin, "Have you read the paper on modern poetry?" "Do you know who wrote it?" or, "Is it true it is by Mr. Fotheringham?"

Violet, though much confused, could not help having a sort of satisfaction in seeing that neither could Theodora defend herself from blushes, nor so preserve her equanimity as always to know what she was saying, though she made heroic efforts, and those ignorant of the state of affairs might not perhaps detect her embarrassment. If there had been affection, surely this calmness must have given way!

One day Theodora was in a shop, and Violet waiting for her, when Mr. Fotheringham passed, and instantly coming to the carriage-door, shook hands warmly, seemed rejoiced at the meeting, spoke of his last letter from John in high approval of Mr. Fanshawe, and told her that in two days' time he was going to take a walking tour in Ireland. At that instant the signal was made for taking up Miss Martindale, and with a hasty farewell he disappeared, as Violet thought, unseen.

On coming home, Theodora went at once upstairs; Violet some little time after chanced to go to her room to ask her a question on her way to dress, found her knock unanswered, but heard sounds which caused her gently to open the door.

Theodora was kneeling by the bed, her face buried in her hands, her neck crimson, sobbing and weeping in such violent grief as Violet had never witnessed. She stood terrified, unnoticed, hardly able to bear not to offer comfort, but she understood that nature too well not to be convinced that no offence would be so great as to break into her grief and to intrude upon what she chose to hide.

Violet, therefore, retreated, hoping that now there might

be an opening for sympathy, some depression that would allow her to show her fellow-feeling; but no; when they met again, Theodora was as cheerful and disengaged as ever, and she could almost have persuaded herself that these tears had been a dream.

Perhaps they so appeared to Theodora. She had been surprised into them, and was angry at having been overcome, she who cared so little, but she had woman's feelings, though she had proved to be unfit for the dominion of man, and was henceforth ready to stand alone, and use her strength for the benefit of the weak. She would be the maiden aunt, the treasure of the family, and Arthur's house should be the centre of her usefulness and attachments.

Therefore, so far from struggling against Violet, she delighted in the care of one so tender and caressing; looked on her as the charm and interest of her life, and rejoiced in being valuable at present, and likely to render most important services, attaining in fact the solid practical usefulness she had always coveted.

Everything that could please or amuse Violet she did, even to the length of drawing her out about Wrangerton, and suppressing a certain jealousy of Annette that was ready to spring up on discovering how strong was the affection bestowed on that sister. Violet was especially happy in being able to talk of home just now, when she was continually hearing of Albert's marriage, and the arrangements consequent thereon, and would have felt it blank indeed to have no one but Sarah to share her interest.

Uncle Christopher went to the wedding, and was invited to dinner in Cadogan-place the Sunday after his return. Theodora condescended to be frankly entertained with his dry humorous account of the magnificent doings that had diverted him extremely, and caused Arthur and Violet to congratulate themselves that, in their case, Matilda had not been allowed her own way.

"What a sensible agreeable person your uncle is," said Theodora, as Violet lay down to rest on the sofa, after

dinner, and to turn over and fondle one by one the little presents sent to her from Wrangerton.

Violet smiled thanks and pleasure in the praise, and Theodora set to work to gratify her by admiring each gift as much as her conscience would let her; and was well pleased to find that she was not at all wanted to commend a wonderful embroidered *sachet* from the bride, nor a pair of gorgeous screens from Matilda, but that what was dwelt upon were some sketches in Wrangerton Park, and the most prized of all was a little pair of socks in delicate fancy-knitting for Johnnie.

"Dear, dear mamma! her own pretty rose-leaf pattern. Think of her knitting for my Johnnie! He will soon know grandmamma's socks!" and she put her fingers into one to judge of the size, and admire the stitch. Theodora could see her do such things now, and not think her foolish.

"Theodora, dear," said she, after a long pause, "there is something I have been wanting to say to you for a long time. If I should be as ill as I was before, if I should not live, I should like one thing —"

Theodora took her hand between both hers, for she could not answer.

"I should like to know that his grandmamma would see my Johnnie, if it was only for once. I know poor Arthur could not bear to hear me talk of this, and he is anxious enough already, but you would tell him. You will manage for mamma to see my boy, won't you?"

"I would take him to her at Wrangerton myself."

"I am quite content that you should chiefly take care of him, you know. I am glad you have been here so long that he has grown fond of you. It makes it much better to think of leaving him and his dear papa, to know they have you."

"But, Violet, you must not talk so!" cried Theodora, in a half-choked voice.

"No, I must not make myself cry," said Violet quietly. "I will not go on, when I have asked you one thing more, and that is, to write to John, and tell him that I thank him

for all he has done for me, and that this has been a very happy year. You and John will comfort —"

Violet checked herself, for the tears could only be restrained by silence — and she had made many resolutions against agitation.

"All you wish!" exclaimed Theodora, "but indeed you must not think there is any fear —"

"I will not talk about it," said Violet, in her submissive voice.

"No, nor think about it!"

"I try not to do so more than I ought. I am glad you are here!"

It was dark enough for Theodora to allow her eyes to fill with soft tears, without a struggle to keep them back. The pleasure of being valued was very great, and the entire trust Violet reposed on her gave her as deep delight as she had ever experienced. What would it not be after having nursed her and been everything to Arthur? With Violet and Arthur depending on her, she could feel herself good for something, and filling a place in the world.

CHAPTER XIX.

The loveliest flowers the closest cling to earth,
And they first feel the sun; so violets blue,
So the soft star-like primrose drenched in dew,
The happiest of spring's happy fragrant birth,
To gentlest touches, sweetest tones reply;
So humbleness, with her low-breathed voice,
Can steal o'er man's proud heart, and win his choice.

"She is ready to see you," said Arthur, meeting Theodora, as she came down at nine the next morning after church.

Violet's face, white as a lily, was on the pillow, and a little dark downy head was beside her.

A sense of being too late, of neglect and disappointment, rushed over Theodora, and made her looks not what the mother expected, as with smiling eyes and feeble voice she said, "Your niece, dear Theodora."

"I did not know —" were Theodora's first words, and their dissatisfied sound made Arthur regret his abrupt introduction; though she recovered herself enough to say something of gladness, and of hopes that Violet was comfortable.

"Yes, thank you, quite. I am so thankful! I am so glad of everything. Now I hope Arthur will not lose the 12th of August."

"Only don't talk, now, my sweet one. Come, Theodora," as if he only wanted to get her out of the room.

"I have not looked at the baby. What a fine one!" and she was going to take her.

"Oh, please, don't!" said Violet; "she will begin screaming again!" Then, seeing the cloud return, "Presently, dear aunt, when she wakes. Is not she a beauty?"

Arthur, his hand on the door, hurried Theodora again.

"I will come," she said, impatiently, "I will come, and sit with you after breakfast, Violet; I only wish I had been called."

"Indeed, I know how kind you would have been," said Violet, holding her hand, and watching to see whether the displeasure was removed: "but it seemed a pity to disturb you. Please don't be vexed; I 'll give you plenty of trouble yet."

She had roused herself enough to alarm Arthur, and the nurse.

"This will never do," he said, laying his hand on his sister's arm, and drawing her away almost by force: "You *must* keep quiet, Violet."

"I will, indeed; but please, Theodora —"

"She pleases all you wish. Never mind," said Arthur, fairly putting her out, then stepping back, "Lie still, and mind your big baby; that is all you have to do."

"Only don't let her be vexed."

"No such thing."

But when out of Violet's hearing he could not refrain from telling Theodora his displeasure. "I thought you had more sense, or I would never have let you in."

"I knew nothing of it."

"Your own fault for marching off at that time in the morning! I had been up to tell you, and could not think where you were."

"Why was I not allowed to be of use?"

"A pretty specimen of your usefulness, vexing her with your black looks, till she was talking herself into a fever!"

"Surely she is doing well!"

"She was, unless you have undone everything with your humours."

"I don't know what you mean."

That was the last word. Theodora sat swelling under the sense of injustice and neglect, where she had intended to be so important; and Arthur was weary enough in mind and body to be more than usually sensible of her ungraciousness, and to miss the refreshment of cheerful sympathy. On going up after breakfast he found Violet weaker and more ill than he had previously thought her, and her solicitous inquiries about his sister made him the more attribute this to distress at those moody looks. He would not hear of again admitting Theodora, and in bitterness of spirit she wrote the letters, and tried to content Johnnie — all in vain; for strive to conceal it as she would, he always seemed to perceive her bad moods, and never would be happy with her when she was in one of them.

Every hour brought fresh mortification. She was jealous of Arthur's being needful to the patient, and jealous of being left by him; angry at being treated as useless, and angry at the work she had to do; certain that her ill temper was Arthur's fancy, yet certain he had caused it; anxious about Violet, yet disdaining his anxiety. She was much annoyed at his keeping aloof from her unpleasing looks, deserting the dinner-table after the first course, and when she had waited long for him, leaving her to discover that he had had a cup of tea in Violet's room, and was gone down to smoke. The kindly affections that had always been the hope of her character were rejected and thwarted, and thus

thrown back on herself, the wayward wilful spirit began to rise.

She paced the dull walk in the square gardens in the summer twilight, and thought of the life before her, uncherished at home, an intruder in the family where she had expected to earn fond gratitude, rejected by him who had loved her from childhood!

There was an alternative! One look of encouragement, and Lord St. Erme was at her disposal, ready to rejoice at acceptance, even if she should tell him that she had no heart to bestow. She would be no longer spurned and cast aside; she should be able to befriend Violet, she would live uncontrolled, adored; above all she would teach Percy Fotheringham that she did not pine for him! She would belie those foolish tears that Violet had seen her shed!

As she opened the gate to leave the gardens, Lord St. Erme rode by with a young lady.

Was he passing from her power? The spirit of rivalry prompted a gracious bow and smile. He checked his horse, looked delighted, and introduced "his sister."

A fair, delicate, blushing girl of sixteen, a pretty likeness of himself, bent her head low, and Theodora felt that her blue eyes were intently perusing her under their downcast lids, while the brother's tones almost trembled with the pleasure of her unwonted look of encouragement. He said that he was enjoying having his sister alone with him, at his aunt's house in London, for a short time, and added something about calling. She gave one of her bewitching smiles, and they rode on.

There at least she was prized! How unlike this to the treatment she met with from her own family! If she could not love the Earl, she could do very well without that nonsense; and she should escape from her unloving home, begin a new life, reign queen o'er herself and him, idolized, uncontradicted, with ample opportunities of usefulness, triumphant over him who had disdained her.

So she mused while taking off her bonnet, till Sarah

brought a message that Mrs. Martindale would be glad to see her. An hour ago and she would have rejoiced; now, Arthur's household was becoming a secondary object, since they had rejected her, and driven her to seek fresh interests.

She was received with hands outstretched. "Dear Theodora, thank you. Will you stay and take care of baby and me while nurse goes to supper?"

"If I may."

"Thank you. Nurse, pray give baby to Miss Martindale. You need not hurry; I shall be so comfortable."

The sweet pale face and languid eyes were as a charm to expel all but kindly thoughts, as Theodora sat down with the living weight warm on her lap, and the gentle mother at intervals softly asking about her boy. "Poor little man, they would not let him come in: they kept away both the people I wanted."

"Arthur guards you most jealously."

"Yes; is not he a wonderful nurse? I had to exercise a little self-will in getting you here. How good we must be to make him forgive us!"

Next. "You cannot think what a difference it makes to have you here. I never need think about Arthur's being made comfortable."

Theodora's sincerity longed for confession, and she refrained with difficulty. Those unconscious words set her vile temper before her in its true light. She had resented the being treated with consideration, and had been moody towards her brother, because he was under anxiety!

Self-convicted, she gave a deep sigh; but fearing again to distress Violet, began to admire the baby, who was in truth a remarkably large and handsome child, very dark and like the Martindales, and, both in size and serenity, such a contrast to her brother, that, proud as she was of her, her mamma only half liked praise of her that might be depreciation of him, and began to defend him from the charge of crying before he had had strength for it.

Her name, of course, was to be Helen, and to this Violet softly added, Theodora.

"No, no; that will bring her no good. It is Aunt Nesbit's name."

"It is one I love the sound of."

"You won't another time."

Violet vaguely perceived something amiss; but too weak to think about it, closed her eyes and fell into a doze.

Those few gentle sayings had brought back Theodora's affection and sense of right. She longed to recall her glance. If it had taken effect she must persevere. She could not endure the humiliation of having a third time trifled with a lover; she would not feel herself sunk into a mere coquette. But what would Violet think?

Violet suddenly awoke with a terrified gaze. Arthur! Arthur! O, where is he?"

"Down stairs, dearest; he will come." But to her extreme alarm the words had no effect.

"Arthur! O, when will he come? — why did he go away?"

Dismayed out of all presence of mind, Theodora rang with a violent peal, and flew downstairs, the baby in her arms, rousing Arthur from a slumber in his chair by breathless tidings that Violet was worse — was delirious; Mr. Harding must be sent for —

When Arthur had hurried upstairs, it proved to be only a frightened wakening, such as had often happened last year. She was perfectly conscious, but so much fluttered and agitated by Theodora's own proceedings, that it was with great difficulty that Arthur could soothe and tranquillize her on her baby's account. The nurse was very angry, and Theodora perceived her delinquency might have serious consequences, especially when she beheld Violet, still tremulous from the alarm, endeavouring to re-assure them, to shield her from displeasure, and to take all the blame to herself for her foolish terror.

There was an end of Theodora's grand designs of nur-

sing! She could only enter the room at all by favour of the patient and by sufferance of the nurse; and she could attempt no remonstrance when ordered off by her brother, and even felt unworthy of Violet's kiss.

That little scene of trivialities had been her first true humiliation. It had shown her the vanity of her boast of strength of mind; for when she thought of the morning's unreasonable ill humour, and unkindness to her brother and his wife at such a moment, and of the coquetry with Lord St. Erme, she was indeed lowered in her own eyes; and it was sorrow, not bitterness.

Her heart was very heavy, but less hard. Slowly had the power of Violet's meekness and lowliness been stealing into her affections, and undermining her pride. Perhaps the direct attacks of Percy, though strongly resisted, had in reality given a shock which prepared the way for the silent effect of sweetness and forbearance. At any rate, she was now sincerely sorry for the sin as well as the folly of the past day; and felt that it might bring a penalty in perplexities about Lord St. Erme, if he had really taken her smile for encouragement.

Many were her resolutions of amiability for to-morrow; but she was disappointed. Violet had passed a restless night, and could not be visited; and Arthur, after his experience of yesterday, was in no haste to subject himself to his sister's humours. Her two years of caprice and neglect had told even on his easy temper.

It had long been a scheme of hers to surprise Violet on her recovery with a likeness of Johnnie, taken by a small, humble niece of Mrs. Harrison's, lately started in life as an artist in crayons; and in the midst of yesterday's sullenness she had taken measures which this morning brought the lady to Cadogan-place, at the hour when he was most likely to be in his best looks. Sarah, highly approving of anything that exalted Master John, sedulously traced the one-sided masculine division in his flaxen locks, and tied his best white frock with scarlet ribbons, in honour, as she said, of his

being "a little granny-dear;" and Theodora carried him down, and heard him pronounced "a lovely interesting darling."

Sitting well was not, however, one of his perfections; he could not be induced to show his face to a stranger, and turned from toys and pictures, with arms stretched out to his aunt, and piteous calls for mamma. To Theodora's further despair, Arthur came in, and stood amazed, so that she had to unfold her plans, and beg him to keep the secret. He smiled, saying she might as well take a picture of a washed-out doll; but that Violet would be sure to like it.

Meantime, the child was presenting a golden opportunity; fixed in rapt contemplation of his father, and gazing motionless, with one little foot doubled under him, and one tiny white arm drooping over the crimson sofa cushion. Miss Piper sketched as if for her life. Theodora directed Arthur's attention to his little son. He spoke to him, and was surprised and pleased at the plainness of the reply, and the animated spring of gladness. In another minute he was sitting on the floor, most successfully entertaining the child, while Miss Piper could hardly help drawing that handsome black head in contrast with the small, white creature, whose morsels of hands were coaxing his brown red cheeks; and Theodora looked on, amused to see how papa succeeded in drawing out those pretty, hesitating smiles, so embellishing to the little face, that had generally more than the usual amount of baby gravity.

They were in full debate whether he should be represented smiling or grave; the aunt wishing the latter as the habitual expression, the father declaring that "the fellow was only fit to be seen smiling like his mother;" when suddenly there was an announcement —

"Lady Lucy Delaval and Lord St. Erme."

Arthur hardly had time to start up from the ground, his colour deepening with discomfiture as he glanced at the disarray of the room, littered with playthings, displaced cushions, newspapers, with which he had been playing bo-

peep, drawing materials, all in as much confusion as the hair, which in an unguarded moment he had placed at the mercy of Johnnie's fingers.

Theodora comprehended the sharp click with which he rang the nursery bell, and the half frown with which he watched in dread of a cry, while Lady Lucy tried to make friends with Johnnie.

The drawing was brought under discussion; but he held aloof after one look, which Theodora perceived to be disapproving, though she did not know that the reason was that the smile, somewhat overdone by Miss Piper, had brought out one of old Mr. Moss's blandest looks. Meantime Lord St. Erme talked to the little artist, giving her some valuable hints, which she seized with avidity, and then quietly retreated.

Arthur tried to talk to Lady Lucy; but she was very young, not yet come out, timid, and, apparently, afraid of something that she had to say, watching Miss Martindale as earnestly as she dared; while Lord St. Erme spoke eagerly, yet as if he hardly knew what he was saying, of art, music, books, striving in vain to obtain one of the looks of yesterday.

It warmed Theodora's heart to feel herself the object of such enthusiastic admiration, but she preserved her look of rigid indifference. It was a long visit; but at last the brother made the move, looking at his sister, as if to remind her of something.

"Oh, Miss Martindale," said she, with an effort, "we thought you must be staying in a great deal. Would you be so kind, now and then, as to walk with me?"

This was an alarming request, and not very easy to refuse. Theodora said something of seeing about it, and hoping —

"It would be such a treat," said Lady Lucy, growing bolder, as the two gentlemen were speaking to each other. "My aunt is gone to her brother's little parsonage, where there is no room for me, and my governess had to go home,

luckily, so that we are quite alone together; and St. Erme said perhaps you would be so kind sometimes as to walk with me —"

Theodora smiled. "I hope we may meet sometimes," said she. "If my sister was downstairs, perhaps we might; but I am engaged to her."

Thus ended the visit, and Arthur, hastily throwing the cushions back into their places, demanded "What on earth could possess those folks to come here now?"

"It was an inconvenient time," said Theodora.

"Dawdling and loitering here! — a man with nothing better to do with his time!"

"Nay," said Theodora, touched by the injustice; "Lord St. Erme is no man not to know how to dispose of his time."

"Whew!" whistled Arthur; "is the wind gone round to that quarter? Well, I thought better of you than that you would like a fellow that can do nothing but draw, never shoots over his own moors, and looks like a German singer! But do put the room tidy; and if you must have the nursery down here, put it into the back room for mercy sake!"

He went away, having thus stirred her feelings in the St. Erme direction, and he left them to take their chance for the rest of the day. She took a solitary walk; on her return saw a hat in the hall, and asking whether Mr. Harding was there, was told no, but that Mr. Gardner was with Captain Martindale. And after long waiting till Arthur should come to dinner, he only put in his head, saying, "Oh, Theodora, are you waiting? I beg your pardon, I am going out to dinner. You can sit with Violet; and if she should want me, which she won't, James knows where to find me."

Theodora scorned to inquire of the servant whither his master was gone; but her appetite forsook her at the sight of the empty chair, and the recollection of the warning against Mark Gardner.

This was not her last solitary dinner. Arthur had engagements almost every day, or else went to his club; and when at home, if he was not with Violet, he sat in his own room,

and would never again assist at the sittings, which were completed under less favourable auspices, soon enough to allow time for the framing before the mamma should come down stairs. Her recovery proceeded prosperously; and Theodora was quite sufficiently in request in her room to be satisfied, and to make it difficult to find a spare afternoon to go and order one of her favourite oak frames.

However, she was at length able to make the expedition; and she was busy in giving directions as to the width of margin, when from the interior of the shop there came forward no other than the Earl of St. Erme.

They shook hands, and she sent her excuses to Lady Lucy, for having been too much occupied to call, asking whether she was still in town?

"Only till Thursday," he said; "when I take her to join my aunt, who is to show her the Rhine."

"Do not you go with them?"

"I have not decided. It depends upon circumstances. Did not I hear something of your family visiting Germany?"

"Perhaps they may," said Theodora, drily.

He began to study the portrait, and saw some likeness, but was distressed by something in the drawing of the mouth.

"Yes," said Theodora, "I know it is wrong, but Miss Piper could not see it as I did, and her alterations only made it worse, till I longed to be able to draw."

"I wonder if I might venture," said Lord St. Erme, screwing up his eye, and walking round the picture. "I am sure, with your artist eye, you must know what it is not to be able to keep your hands off."

"Not I," said Theodora, smiling. "Pencils are useless tools to me. But it would be a great benefit to the picture, and Miss Piper will fancy it all her own."

"You trust me, then?" and he turned to ask for a piece of chalk, adding, "But is it not too bold a measure without the subject?"

"He is in the carriage, with his nurse;" and Theodora,

unable to resist so material an improvement to her gift, brought him in, and set him up on the counter opposite to a flaming picture of a gentleman in a red coat, which he was pleased to call papa, and which caused his face to assume a look that was conveyed to the portrait by Lord St. Erme, and rendered it the individual Johnny Martindale, instead of merely a pale boy in a red sash.

Theodora was too much gratified not to declare it frankly, and to say how much charmed his mother would be; and she was pleased by a remark of Lord St. Erme, that showed that his poet mind comprehended that wistful intelligence that gave a peculiar beauty to Johnnie's thin white face.

She thought to pay off her obligations by an immediate visit to his sister, while she knew him to be safe out of the way; and, driving to Mrs. Delaval's, she sent her nephew home, intending to walk back.

Lady Lucy was alone; and she found her a gentle, simple-hearted girl, with one sole affection, namely, for the brother who was the whole world to her; and taking Miss Martindale, on his word, as an object of reverence and admiration. It was impossible not to thaw towards her: and when Theodora spoke of the embellishment of the portrait, she needed no more to make her spring up, and fetch a portfolio to exhibit her brother's drawings. Admirable they were; sketches of foreign scenery, many portraits in different styles of Lady Lucy herself, and the especial treasure was a copy of Tennyson, interleaved with illustrations in the German style, very fanciful and beautiful. Theodora was, however, struck by the numerous traces she saw of the Lalla Rookh portrait. It was there as the dark-eyed Isabel; again as Judith, in the Vision of Fair Women; it slept as the Beauty in the Wood; and even in sweet St. Agnes, she met it refined and purified; so that at last she observed: "It is strange how like this is to my mother."

"I think it must be," said Lady Lucy; "for I was quite struck by your likeness to St. Erme's ideal sketches."

Rather annoyed, Theodora laughed, and turning from the portfolio, asked if she did not also draw?

"A little; but mine are too bad to be looked at."

Theodora insisted, and the drawings were produced: all the best had been done under Lord St. Erme's instruction. The affection between the brother and sister touched her, and thinking herself neglectful of a good little girl, she offered to take the desired walk at once. While Lady Lucy was preparing, however, the brother came home, and oh! the inconvenient satisfaction of his blushing looks.

Yet Theodora pardoned these, when he thanked her for being kind to his sister; speaking with a sort of parental fondness and anxiety of his wish to have Lucy with him, and of his desire that she should form friendships that would benefit her.

Never had he spoken with so much reality, nor appeared to so much advantage; and it was in his favour, too, that Theodora contrasted this warm solicitude for his young sister with the indifference of her own eldest brother. There was evidently none of the cold distance that was the grievance of her home.

"Lady Lucy is almost out of the school-room," she said. "You will soon be able to have her with you in the country."

"There are certainly some considerations that might make me resolve on an English winter," said Lord St. Erme.

"Every consideration, I should think."

"Fogs and frosts, and clouds, that hang like a weight on the whole frame," said Lord St. Erme, shivering.

"Healthy freshening mists, and honest vigorous frosts to brace one for service," said Theodora, smiling.

"O Miss Martindale!" cried Lady Lucy, entering; "are you persuading St. Erme to stay all the year in England? I do so wish he would!"

"Then you ought to make him," said Theodora.

"If Miss Martindale were to express a wish or opinion—"

She saw it was time to cut him short. "Every one's opinion must be the same," she said.

"O," cried Lucy, "of course Italy is pleasanter. It is selfish to wish to keep him here; but if I had my will, we would live together at Wrangerton, and have such nice poor people."

"A *château en Espagne* indeed, my little sister! Wrangerton is a most forlorn place, an old den of the worst period of architecture, set down just beyond the pretty country, but in the programme of all the tourists as a show place; the third-rate town touching on the park, and your nice poor people, not even the ordinary English peasantry, but an ill-disposed set of colliers."

Theodora looked, but did not speak.

"Miss Martindale thinks me a laggard, but she hears my excuse."

"If they are ill-disposed," said Theodora, in her low severe voice (she could not help it), "it is for want of influence from the right quarter."

"My agent tells me they are perfectly impracticable."

"Knights of old liked something impracticable." She was almost ready to check herself, but there was something inspiriting in the idea of awakening this youth, who seemed to catch at her words as if she were a damsel sending forth a champion. His reply was —

"Those were days worth living for. Then the knight's *devoir* was poetry in real life."

"Devoir is always poetry in real life," said Theodora. "What is it but the work ready to hand? Shrinking from it is shrinking from the battle. Come, Lady Lucy, I will not detain you."

Lord St. Erme seemed about to say something as he shook hands, but it did not come. The walk was passed by the simple-hearted Lucy discoursing of the events by which she counted her eras, namely, his visits. Her perfect brother was her only theme.

CHAPTER XX.

Yet learn the gamut of Hortensio.
Taming of the Shrew.

Mrs. Nesbit was recommended to spend some months at Baden-Baden; and Theodora formed a design, which highly pleased Arthur and Violet, of spending this time, while the family were absent, and while Arthur was in Scotland, as hostess at Martindale to Violet and the children.

After seeing Arthur off to Windsor for the next fortnight, Theodora had begun writing to propose the scheme to her father, when she was interrupted by the announcement of Lord St. Erme.

To visit her alone was a strong measure, and she put on a panoply of dignified formality. He began to say he had brought a German book, to show her a poem of which their conversation had reminded him. "I understand very little German," said she, coldly. "I once had a German governess whom I disliked so much that I took a disgust to the language."

"There is so much that is beautiful and untranslateable in its literature, that I am sure it would recompense you."

"I do not like the German tone of mind. It is vapoury and unreal."

"I should like to show you cause to alter your opinion, but—"

"This is English," said Theodora, as her eye fell on a paper of verses that marked the place.

"Ah, Lucy made me put it in. A few lines that occurred to me after watching Mrs. Martindale's little boy."

Thankful that they were not inspired by Venus's little boy, she glanced over them, and saw they were in his best style, simple and pretty thoughts on the child's content, wherever he traced any symbol of his father.

"Poor little Johnnie is highly flattered," she said. "His mamma will be delighted."

He begged her attention to the German poem; she

glanced onward as he read, watching for shoals a-head, and spied something about a *hochbeseeltes Mädchen* inspiring a *Helden-Sänger-Geist*, and grew hotter and hotter till she felt ready to box his ears for intoning German instead of speaking plain English, and having it over. A cotton umbrella arose before her eyes, she heard the plashing gravel, and an honest voice telling her she was a grand creature in great need of being broken in.

The critical stanza had commenced, the reader's voice trembled; Theodora did not heed, her mind was in the avenue at home. An opening door startled them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Albert Moss."

Her brother's brother-in-law! the son and partner of Lord St. Erme's steward! Was it thus his suit was to be checked?

There was no recognition; he went on reading his German to himself, while Albert presented Mrs. Albert Moss, resplendent in bridal finery, and displaying her white teeth in a broad smile, as with a nod, half-gracious, half-apologetic, she said, "I fear we interrupt a lesson; but we will not inconvenience you; we will go at once to our dear convalescent."

"Thank you, you do not interrupt me, and I do not think my sister is dressed yet. Indeed, I doubt whether I ought to allow her to see any one."

"O, you cannot be so cruel!" cried Mrs. Moss, holding up her hands; "one little peep! our only day in town!"

"Yes," said Albert. "I could not but gratify my Louisa's anxiety to be introduced to her new relatives."

"I am afraid you must be disappointed, for my brother is with his regiment at Windsor, and my sister is still so weak that she ought to have no excitement."

"And we have only a few hours in town! The inexorable claims of business have recalled us to Wrangerton!"

The Earl looked up surprised, as if the word had recalled him from the clouds.

"You have been in Wales, I think," said Theodora. "Were you pleased?"

"Oh! I was enraptured!" exclaimed the bride; "the sublime and romantic could be carried no higher! it makes me quite discontented with our home scenery."

"Your sister would not approve of that," said Theodora to Albert; "she can bear no slight to Helvellyn."

"I forget — is there a view of Helvellyn from Wrangerton?" said Lord St. Erme, still somewhat dreamily.

Mrs. Moss started at hearing such good English from the German master, and patronisingly said, "Yes. Helvellyn is monarch of our picturesque. Do you ever come northwards?"

"Not so often as, perhaps, I ought. I am afraid I know more of the Alps than of Helvellyn."

"I am sure," continued the voluble lady, "if ever you thought of such a scheme when the season is over, it would be well worth your while. I could reckon up many respectable families, who, with such introductions — let me see, there are the Joneses, and the Dunlops, and the Evelyns, to say nothing of my new sisters, the Miss Mosses."

"I have no doubt it is a very good neighbourhood," said Lord St. Erme, rising. "I must go, or we shall miss the train. Can you tell me how soon you expect Lord Martindale?"

"About the tenth or eleventh," said Theodora.

"Thank you. Then I must wish you good-by —"

"And I must thank you in my sister's name for the pleasure she will take in what you have done for her little boy. Remember me to Lady Lucy."

That name was a revelation to Albert, and the door had scarcely closed before he exclaimed — "Surely, Miss Martindale, that could not be Lord St. Erme?"

"Yes, it was."

"Well!" cried Mrs. Moss, "there was something decidedly the aristocrat in his mustache!"

Albert could not recover from his vexation at having missed such a chance, and was nearly setting off in pursuit

of his lordship. Theodora was glad to escape for a moment, on the plea of seeing whether Violet could receive a visit.

In her absence the bride began — "I can't see that she is so handsome, after all! And I should be ashamed to wear such a dress as that!"

"Distinguished people have freaks, my love. Bless me! if I had but known the Earl!"

"I see how it is!" said the wife; "a proud Countess we shall have."

"If one of the girls had but been here! Every one of them is prettier than this Miss Martindale. Who knows?"

"Ah! I shall take care in a friendly way to let your sister know how her own family feel at her keeping aloof —"

"I do not believe it is her fault, poor child," said Albert. "Martindale has set this haughty young lady to keep guard over her —"

"We shall see," said the bride. "I am not used to be refused, and once with your sister, I will discover all her secrets."

Fortunately for Violet, Theodora had found her so much exhausted by the fatigue of dressing, that she thought it safest, considering what a bride it was, not to divulge her presence in the house; and she came down with this intelligence, trying to compensate for it by civility, and by showing the children.

Mrs. Moss was not easily repulsed; she begged Miss Martindale to reconsider her verdict.

"I must not relent; I am accountable to the doctor and to my brother."

"It shall not be your fault. You shall know nothing of it. I will find my way. Ah! I 'm a giddy young thing. Nothing can stop me!" and she stepped forward, laughing affectedly, and trying to look arch.

"I cannot permit this. It might do serious harm," said Theodora, obliged to stand in her path, and to put on such a look of haughty command, that she was positively subdued and frightened, and went back to her seat in a meek state

of silence, whence she only recovered to overwhelm poor Johnnie with her attentions. He cried and was sent away, and Mrs. Moss was obliged to be satisfied with the baby, though she looked as dignified and as little to be taken liberties with as any Martindale of them all.

They lingered on, hoping to weary out Miss Martindale's patience, or that some chance might reveal their presence to Violet; but in vain; Theodora's politeness was exemplary, and she endured Mrs. Albert Moss's familiarity so well, that when at length they departed, the last words were a parting whisper, "Good morning, Miss Martindale. If we had known what we interrupted — but ah! I have gone through those things so lately, that I know how to feel for you, and can keep your secret."

"There is no subject of secrecy that I know of," said Theodora, more coldly than ever.

Hateful woman! Poor Violet! There, now, it will be all over the country that I am engaged to him! I must take him now, or I hope he will give it up on discovering my connexions! Then I can despise him. Foolish man! why could he not say what he wanted? I should have got rid of him then; I was in the mood! However, he is out of the way for the present. Now to make the best of it with Violet.

Violet was grieved, both for her own sake and the vexation at home, but she so sweetly acquiesced in its having been right, and was so sure that her sister meant nothing but kindness, that Theodora, knowing that she herself could not have submitted with anything like patience, admired and loved her more than ever.

The gentleness and quietness of her demeanour were a refreshment to Theodora's tossed and undecided mind; and in administering to her comfort and pleasure, the anxieties and remorse subsided into a calm like her own. How delightful was the day of her introduction to Johnnie's portrait; her admiration, and tearful gratitude to the kind deviser of the gift, were the greatest pleasure Theodora had known for

months; the discussion of every feature, the comparison of Johnnie with it, the history of the difficulties, and of his papa's assistance, seemed a never-ending treat to both giver and receiver. The poem, too; it was very amusing to see how she could hardly believe that original verses could possibly be written on her boy, and then when set to guess whose they were, she began with a hesitating "Miss Marstone is the only person near who makes verses, and these are too pretty to be hers."

"Ah! if you would follow Emma's advice, and call the baby Osyth, after the first Prioress, you might have a chance from that quarter."

It could not be Mr. Fotheringham, the only poet she could think of, and she could only beg to be told.

"There is one whom a Wrangerton woman should not forget."

"Lord St. Erme! You *are* laughing at me, Theodora. He never even saw Johnnie!"

Theodora explained the two meetings, anxious to see her way of thinking. "It is a wonderful thing!" was her first remark. "Who would have told me how it would be three years ago? They are very pretty."

"I do not think you like them the better for being his," said Theodora.

"I ought," said Violet; "no other great man ever seems to me so grand as our own Earl."

"I want your real feeling."

"You know," said Violet, smiling, "I cannot think them done only for Johnnie's sake —"

"And, therefore, they do not please you."

"Not exactly that; but — if you don't mind my saying so, I feel as if I had rather — it might be better—. I don't want to be ungrateful, but if you were getting into a scrape for the sake of pleasing me, I should be sorry. Forgive me, Theodora, you made me say so."

"You are consideration itself," said Theodora, affectionately. "Never mind, he is out of the way. We will let

him go off poetizing to Germany; and under your wing at home, I will get into no more mischief."

That was a pleasant prospect, and Violet reposed on the thought of the enjoyment of Martindale without its formidable inhabitants; trying in it to forget the pain of parting with her husband for a month, and her longings to spend it at her own home, and see Johnnie strengthened by Helvellyn breezes; while to Theodora it seemed like the opening into peace and goodness.

One forenoon, Violet, on coming downstairs, found her sister writing extremely fast, and seeing an envelope on the table in Lord Martindale's writing, asked if it was his answer to Theodora's plan.

"Yes."

"Ah!" said Violet, perceiving something was amiss, "they have spared you to me a long time already."

"Don't be uneasy," said Theodora; "I 'll settle it."

"But," exclaimed Violet, "I could not bear that you should be with me if they want you."

"That is not it; papa has something in his head; I will settle it."

Violet knew what was indicated by the over-erectness of Theodora's head. To be the cause of family discussion was frightful, but she had a nervous dread of thwarting Theodora.

"I wish you would not look at me!" exclaimed Theodora.

"I beg your pardon," sighed she.

"What 's the use of that when I know you are not satisfied, and do not trust me."

"Don't be angry with me," implored Violet, with a quivering voice, and tears of weakness in her eyes. "I cannot help it. I do not want to interfere, but as it is for me, I must beg you to tell me you are not pressing to stay with me when Lady Martindale wishes for you."

"No one ever wants me. No; but papa thinks that you and I cannot be trusted together. He says he cannot leave me with one who has so little authority."

That indignant voice contrasted with the gentle answer, "I do not wonder, I have always thought if I had been older and better able to manage —"

"No such thing!" exclaimed Theodora; "you are the only person who ever exercised any control over me."

"O, hush! you do not know what you are saying."

"It is the truth, and you know it! When you choose, every one yields to you, and so do I."

"Indeed, I did not know it," said Violet, much distressed. "I am very sorry if I am overbearing; I did not think I was."

Theodora fairly laughed at such a word being applied to the mild, yielding creature, who looked so pale and feeble. "Very domineering, indeed!" she said. "No, no, my dear, it is only that you are always right. When you disapprove, I cannot bear to hurt and grieve you, because you take it so quietly."

"You are so very kind to me."

"So, if papa wishes me to come to good, he had better leave me to you."

"I don't think that ought to be," said Violet, feebly.

"What, not that you should be my only chance—that you should calm me and guide me when every one else has failed—"

"Theodora, dear, I do not think I ought to like to hear you say so. It cannot be safe for you to submit to me rather than to your father."

"He never had any moral power over me. He never convinced me, nor led me to yield my will," said Theodora, proud perhaps of her voluntary submission to her gentle sister-in-law, and magnifying its extent; but Violet was too right-minded, in her simplicity, to be flattered by an allegiance she knew to be misplaced.

"I should not like baby to say so, by and by," she whispered.

"There 's an *esprit de corps* in parents!" cried Theodora, half angrily; "but Helen will never be like me. She will not be left to grow up uncared-for and unloved till one-and-twenty, and then, when old enough for independence, be for

the first time coerced and reproached. If people never concern themselves about their children, they need not expect the same from them as if they had brought them up properly."

"That is a sad thought," pensively said the young mother.

"I declare you shall hear the letter, that you may own that it is unreasonable — unbearable!" And she read —

"'I have been considering your request to spend the time of our absence at home with Mrs. Martindale, but I cannot think fit to comply with it. Arthur's income is fully sufficient to provide change of air for his family; and he ought not to expect always to leave his wife on other people's hands, while he is pursuing his own diversions.'"

Theodora was glad to see that this did rouse Violet's indignation.

"Oh! he does not know. Do tell him it was all your kindness! Tell him that Arthur is not going for long! He must not think such things."

"He thinks much more injustice," said Theodora. "Listen: — 'After so long an absence, it is high time you should rejoin us; and, considering what has occurred, you cannot be surprised that I should be unwilling to leave you with one so young and of so little authority over you. Though I acquit her of all blame for your indiscretions —'"

("There, Violet, I hope you are much obliged to him!) 'I should not have consented to your remaining with her up to the present time, if it had not been a case of urgent necessity, as I wish to have you under my own eye.'

"(As if he had ever made any use of it!) 'You might as well be alone here as with her; and, after your late conduct, I cannot put the confidence in your prudence that I should desire. Violet has, I have no doubt, acted amiably; and her youth, inexperience, and gentleness fully excuse her in my eyes for having been unable to restrain you; but they are reasons sufficient to decide me on not leaving you with her at present. We shall be in London on Monday, the 11th, and I wish you to be in readiness to join us when we embark for

Ostend on the following evening. Give my kind love to Violet, and tell her I am glad she is going on well; and that I am much pleased with my granddaughter's intended name.' "

"There, Violet, what do you think of that?"

"Pray make him understand that Arthur wanted a change very much, and will not be long gone."

"Arthur! You cannot feel for any one else!"

"I did not mean to be selfish," said Violet, sorry for having seemed to be wanting in sympathy.

"No, indeed! You never think what would become of you left alone, with two babies that cannot walk?"

"Never mind me, I shall manage very well; I only cannot have a disturbance made on my account. I cannot think how you can hesitate after such a letter as this."

"That is the very thing. He would never have dared to say these things to my face! Now let me tell you. I know I have been much to blame; you made me feel it. You are taming me; and if he leaves me to you I may be more dutiful when he comes back; but if he strains his new notion of authority too far, and if you throw me off, I shall be driven to do what will grieve and disappoint you."

"But surely," said Violet, "it cannot be the right beginning of being dutiful to resist the first thing that is asked of you."

"You wish me to go to be fretted and angered! to be without one employment to drown painful thoughts, galled by attempts at controlling me; my mind poisoned by my aunt, chilled by my mother — to be given up to my worse nature, without perhaps even a church to go to!"

"It is very hard," said Violet; "but if we are to submit, it cannot be only when we see fit. Would it not be better to make a beginning that costs you something?"

"And lose my hope of peaceful guidance!"

"I do believe," said Violet, "that if you go patiently, because it is your duty, that you will be putting yourself under the true guidance; but for you to extort permission to stay with me, when your father disapproves, would be only

following your own way. I should be afraid. I will not undertake it, for it would not be right, and mischief would be sure to ensue."

"Then you give me up?"

"Give you up! dear, dear sister!" and Violet rose, and threw her arms round Theodora. "No, indeed! When I am so glad that I may love you as I always wished! I shall think of you, and write to you, and pray for you!" whispered she. "All I can I will do for you, but you must not say any more of staying with me now. I can help you better in my right place than out of it."

Theodora returned the caress, and quitted the room, leaving Violet to her regrets and fears. It was a great sacrifice of herself, and, still worse, of her poor little pale boy, and she dreaded that it might be the ruin of the beneficial influence which, to her amazement, she found ascribed to her, in the most unexpected quarter. It had gone to her heart to refuse Theodora's kindness, and all that was left for her was to try to still her fluttering, agitated spirits by the consciousness that she had striven to do right, and by the prayer that all might work for good.

Indeed, it was very remarkable how, in this critical period of Theodora's life, when repentance was engaged in so severe a conflict with her long-nourished pride and passion, in all the tossings of her mind she had, as it were, anchored herself to her docile, gentle sister-in-law, treating her like a sort of embodiment of her better mind. Violet's serenity and lowliness seemed to breathe peace on a storm-tossed ocean; and her want of self-assertion to make Theodora proud of submitting to her slightest wish without a struggle. Those vehement affections were winding themselves about her and her children; and the temper that had flown into fierce insubordination at the first control from lawful authority, laid itself at the feet of one whose power was in meekness. It was the lion curbed by the maiden; but because the subjection was merely a caprice, it was no conquest of self-will.

CHAPTER XXI.

But when the self-abhorring thrill
Is past, as pass it must,
When tasks of life thy spirit fill,
Risen from thy tears and dust,
Then be the self-renouncing will
The seal of thy calm trust.

Lyra Apostolica.

Arthur quitted London the day after his little girl's christening, talking of being absent only a fortnight, before taking his wife to Windsor; and promising to return at once, if she should find herself in the least unwell or dispirited. She was delighted to be well enough not to spoil his sport, and Theodora was too anxious to have him at a distance from Mr. Gardner, to venture on any remonstrance.

It was the day the family were come to London, and he left orders with the ladies to say "all that was proper;" but the twelfth of August was to him an unanswerable reason for immediate departure.

Theodora and Violet went to receive the party in the house in Belgrave Square, both silent, yet conscious of each other's feelings. Theodora paced the room, while Violet leant back in a great blue damask chair, overcome by the beatings of her heart; and yet, when the carriage arrived, it was she who spoke the word of encouragement: "your father is so kind, I know he forgives us!"

Theodora knew Violet thought her own weakness and inefficiency needed pardon, and therefore could bear the saying, and allow it to turn her defiant shame into humility.

Mrs. Nesbit came in, supported between Lord and Lady Martindale; and as Theodora hastened to wheel round the large arm-chair, and settle the cushions for her, her eye glanced in keen inquiry from one niece to the other, and they felt that she was exulting in the fulfilment of her prediction.

Lord Martindale kissed his daughter with grave formality; and, as if to mark the difference, threw much warm affection into his greeting of Violet, and held her hand for

some moments, while he asked solicitously if she were well and strong, and inquired for her little ones.

She made Arthur's excuses and explanations, but broke off, blushing, and disconcerted by that harsh, dry cough of Mrs. Nesbit's, and still more, by seeing Lord Martindale look concerned. She began, with nervous eagerness and agitation, to explain that it was an old engagement, he would not be away long, and then would take her out of town — she was hardly yet ready for a journey. From him she obtained kind smiles, and almost fatherly tenderness; from Lady Martindale, the usual ceremonious civility. They asked her to dinner, but she was not equal to this; they then offered to send her home in the carriage, and when she refused, Lord Martindale said he would walk back with her, while Theodora remained with her mother.

He was much displeased with his son for leaving her, especially when he saw how delicate and weak she still looked; and he was much annoyed at being unable to prevent it, without giving Arthur a premium for selfishness; so that all he could do was to treat her with a sort of compassionate affection, increased at each of her unselfish sayings.

"My dear," he said, "I wish to have a little conversation with you, when it suits you. I am anxious to hear your account of this unfortunate affair."

"Very well;" but he felt her arm tremble.

"You must not alarm yourself. You are the last person deserving of blame. I am only sorry that you should have had so much to harass you."

"O, Theodora has been so very kind to me."

"I rejoice to hear it; but tell me, will this evening or to-morrow morning suit you best?"

"Thank you, to-morrow, if you please," said Violet, glad to defer the evil day.

At that moment she was astonished by the sudden apparition of Lord St. Erme, and still more, by his shaking hands with her. She thanked him for his touches to her little boy's portrait; he smiled, rejoiced that she did not

think he had spoilt it, and remarked upon the likeness. Lord Martindale, who knew him but slightly, listened in surprise; and having now come to her own door, she bade them farewell, and entered the house.

Theodora came back much later than Violet had expected, with a flush on her cheek, and hurry and uncertainty in her manner. She had previously made a great point of their spending this last evening alone together, but her mood was silent. She declared herself bent on finishing the volume of Miss Strickland's *Queens*, which they were reading together, and went on with it till bed-time without intermission, then wished Violet good-night, without another word.

But Violet was no sooner in bed than Theodora came in, in her dressing-gown, and sat down at her feet looking at her, but hardly answering the few words she ventured to speak. It was not till the clock struck twelve that she rose from her seat.

"Well, I must go; but I don't know how to tear myself from the sight of you. I feel as if I was driven from the only place where I ever might be good."

"No," whispered Violet; "wherever our duty lies, we can be good."

"I could, if you were with me, to calm me, and tell me such things."

"You do not want me to tell you them. You have the Bible and Prayer Book."

"I never saw the right way to follow them; till now, when it was gleaming on me, I have to go away."

"The same grace that has shown you your way so far, dearest, will go on to show you further, if you follow it on, even though the way be hard."

"The grace may be with you — it is!" said Theodora, in a heavy, hopeless manner; "but oh! Violet, think how long I have been driving it away!"

Violet sat up, took her hand, pressed it between both hers, and with tears exclaimed: "You must not

speak so. If you had not that grace, should you be sorry now?"

"I don't know. I can hope and see my way to peace when you look at me, or speak to me, but why should I be forced into the desert of my own heart, to loneliness and temptation?"

"If you are really resting on me, instead of on the only true help, perhaps it is better you should be left to it. Theodora, dearest, may I tell you something about myself? When first I saw my difficulties, and could not get at mamma, I felt as if there was no one to help me, but somehow it grew up. I saw how to find out guidance and comfort in the Bible and in such things, and ever since I have been so much happier."

"How did you find it out?"

"John helped me; but I think it comes without teaching from without, and there is my hope for you, Theodora."

"Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way," murmured Theodora, hanging over her, with tears fast dropping.

"He shows himself to those who will follow Him, and yield their own will," said Violet.

"Good night! Oh! what shall I do when I have not you to send me to bed comforted? I had more to say to you, but you have smoothed it all, and I cannot ruffle it up again."

A night of broken sleep, and perplexed waking thoughts, was a bad preparation for the morning's conference. Lord Martindale came to breakfast, and, as before, reserved all his kindness for Violet and the children. Theodora disappeared when the little ones were carried away, and he began the conversation by saying to Violet: "I am afraid you have had a great deal of trouble and vexation."

She replied by warm assurances of Theodora's kindness; whence he led her to tell the history of the rupture, which she did very mournfully, trying to excuse Theodora, but forbidden, by justice to Percival; and finding some relief in taking blame to herself, for not having re-

monstrated against that unfortunate expedition to the races.

"No, my dear, it was no fault of yours. It was not from one thing more than another. It was owing to unhappy, unbroken temper. Take care of your children, my dear, and teach them submission in time." Then presently resuming: "Is it your idea that she had any attachment to poor Fotheringham?"

"Much more than she knew at the time," said Violet.

"Ha! Then you do not think she has given encouragement to that absurd-looking person, Lord St. Erme?"

"Lord St. Erme!" cried Violet, startled.

"Yes; when I parted with you yesterday, he walked back with me, and proceeded to declare that he had been long attached to her, and to ask my sanction to his following us to Germany to pay his addresses."

"Surely he has not spoken to her?"

"No; he said something about not presuming, and of having been interrupted. I could only tell him that it must rest with herself. There is no objection to the young man, as far as I know, though he is an idle, loitering sort of fellow, not what I should have thought to her taste."

"I do not believe she likes him," said Violet.

"You do not? I cannot make out. I told her that she was at liberty to do as she pleased; I only warned her neither to trifle with him, nor to rush into an engagement without deliberation, but I could get nothing like an answer. She was in one of her perverse fits, and I have no notion whether she means to accept him or not."

"I do not think she will."

"I cannot say. No one knows, without a trial, what the notion of a coronet will do with a girl. After all her pretensions she may be the more liable to the temptation. I have not told her aunt, that she may be the more unbiassed. Not that I say anything against him; it is everything desirable in the way of connexion, and probably he is an amiable good

sort of man. What do you know of him? Are you intimate with him?"

Violet explained the extent of their acquaintance. "I do not see my way through it," said Lord Martindale. "I wish I could be clear that it is not all coquetry? I wish John was at home."

"I do not think," said Violet, gathering courage; "I do not think you know how much Theodora wishes to be good."

"I wish she was half as good as you are, my dear!" said Lord Martindale, as if he had been speaking to a child. And he talked to her warmly of her own concerns, and hopes of her visiting Martindale on their return; trying to divest himself of a sense of inhospitality and harshness, which grew on him whenever he looked at her slender figure, and the varying carnation of her thin cheek.

She felt herself obliged to set forth to call on Lady Martindale. Theodora was busy, packing up, and could not accompany her; unfortunately for her, since Mrs. Nesbit took the opportunity of examining her on the same subject, though far from doing it in the same manner; commenting with short sarcastic laughs, censuring Mr. Fotheringham for trying to domineer, but finding much amusement in making out the grounds of his objection to Mrs. Finch, and taking pleasure in bringing, by her inquiries, a glow of confusion and distress on Violet's cheeks. Next she began to blame her for having visited such an imprudent person; and when Lady Martindale ventured to suggest something about her not knowing, and Mrs. Finch having formerly been a friend of the family, she put her down. "Yes, my dear, we are not blaming Mrs. Arthur Martindale. We know it is not possible for every one to be fastidious. The misfortune was in Miss Martindale's being brought into society which could not be expected to be select."

Violet did not think herself called upon to stay to be insulted, and rose to take leave, but did not escape without

further taunts. "So, you are to be in London alone for the next month?"

"Perhaps only for a fortnight!"

"I can promise you that it will be a month. Young men are not apt to spend more time at home than they can help. I am sorry to interfere with your scheme of being installed at Martindale, but it is out of the question. Theodora's absence has been much felt by the curate, and our past experience has prepared us for anything. I hope you will take care of yourself."

Mrs. Nesbit, as she lost her power of self-command and her cleverness, without parting with her bitterness of spirit, had pitiably grown worse and worse, so that where she would once have been courteously sarcastic, she was now positively insolent.

It was too much for Lady Martindale, who, as she saw Violet colour deeply, and tremble as she left the room, followed her to the head of the stairs, and spoke kindly. "You must not imagine, my dear, that either my aunt, or any of us, find fault with you. We all know that you are inexperienced, and that it is not easy to cope with Theodora's eccentricity of character."

Violet, still very weak, could have been hysterical, but luckily was able to command herself, though, "thank you," was all she could say.

"Of course, though such things are unfortunate, we cannot regret the match; Lord Martindale and I are quite convinced that you acted amiably by all parties. Goodbye, my dear, I am sorry I have not time to call and see the children."

"Shall I send them to you when they wake?" said Violet, pleased that they were at length mentioned.

"Thank you, my dear," said Lady Martindale, as if much tempted. "I am afraid not, it might be too much for my aunt. And yet, I should have liked to see the little girl."

"She is such a beauty," said Violet, much brightened. "So exactly like her papa."

"I should like to see her! You have your carriage here of course."

"No, I walked."

"Walked, my dear!" said Lady Martindale, dismayed.

Violet explained how short the distance was, but Lady Martindale seemed not to know how to let her go, nor how to relinquish the thought of seeing her grand-daughter. At last she said, as if it was a great resolution, lowering her voice, "I wonder if I could walk back with you, just to see her."

She took Violet into her room while she put on her bonnet, much as if she feared being found out; and in passing the drawing-room door, gathered her dress together so as to repress its rustling.

Wonder of wonders, to find Lady Martindale actually on foot by her side! She went up at once to the nursery, where the children were asleep. At Johnnie she looked little, but she hung over the cot where lay the round plump baby face of little Helen. Though dreadfully afraid of being missed, she seemed unable to turn away from the contemplation.

"My dear," said she, in an agitated voice, as they left the nursery, "you must not keep these children here in London. You must not sacrifice their health. It is the first consideration. Don't let them stay in that hot nursery! Pray do not."

"We shall be in the country soon," said Violet.

"Why not at once? Does expense prevent you? Tell me, my dear, what it would cost. I always have plenty to spare. Would 100*l.* do it? and you need tell no one. I could give you 200*l.*," said Lady Martindale, who had as little idea of the value of money as any lady in her Majesty's dominions. "I must have that dear little girl in the country. Pray take her to Ventnor. How much shall I give you?"

Much surprised, and more touched, Violet, however, could not accept the offer; she felt that it would be casting a slight on Arthur; and she assured Lady Martindale that

she hoped soon to leave London, and how impossible it was for her to move house without Arthur. It seemed to be a great disappointment, and opened to Violet a fresh insight into Lady Martindale's nature; that there was a warm current beneath, only stifled by Mrs. Nesbit's power over a docile character. There seemed to be hopes that they might love each other at last! In the midst there was a knock at the door, and Lord Martindale entered, much surprised, as well as pleased, to find his wife there, though put in some perplexity by her instantly appealing to him to tell Violet that it was very bad for the children to remain in town, and asking if it could not be managed to send them to the sea-side. He made a grave but kind reply, that he was sorry for it himself, but that Violet had assured him it would not be for long; and Lady Martindale (who did not seem able to understand why the lady of the house could not make everything give way to her convenience) — now becoming alive to the fear of her aunt's missing her, and taking to heart her stolen expedition, hurried him off with her at once. It was not till after their departure that Violet discovered that he had been trying to atone for deficiencies, by costly gifts to herself and her children.

All this time Theodora had been in her own room, packing, as she said; but proceeding slowly, for there was a severe struggle of feelings, and she could not bear that it should be seen. In the pain of parting with Violet, she shrank from her presence, as if she could not endure to prolong the space for last words.

They came at last. Theodora sat ready for her journey, holding her god-daughter in her arms, and looking from her to Violet, without a word; then gazing round the room, which had been the scene of such changes of her whole mind.

At last she spoke, and it was very different from what Violet expected.

"Violet, I will try to endure it; but if I cannot — if you hear of me as doing what you will disapprove, will you refrain from giving me up, and at least be sorry for me?"

After what Lord Martindale had said, Violet could guess at her meaning. "Certainly, dear Theodora. You would not do it if it was wrong?"

"You know what I mean?"

"I think I do."

"And you are not infinitely shocked?"

"No; for you would not do it unless you could rightly."

"How do you mean?"

"Not if there was — anything remaining — of the former —"

"You are a good little thing, Violet," said Theodora, trying to laugh; "nearly as simple as your daughter. You will save her a great deal of trouble, if you tame her while she is young."

Then came a pause, lasting till Theodora thought she heard the carriage.

"You will forgive me if I accept him?"

"I shall know it is all right. I trust you, dear sister."

"Tell me something to help me!"

Violet drew out Helen's cross. "Be patient, be patient," she said. "The worse things are, the more of the cross to be borne."

Theodora held out her hand for it. "I hope I am mending," said she, as she gave it back with a melancholy smile. "It does not give me the bad jealous thoughts I had when first I knew you possessed it. Tell me something to make me patient."

"May I tell you what came into my head after you were talking last night of not seeing your way, and wanting to be led. I thought of a verse in Isaiah." Violet found the place and showed it.

"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon his God."

"Thank you, Violet," said Theodora, looking on to the next verse. "I will try to be patient; I will try not to kindle

a fire for myself. But if they tease me much, if I am very weary —"

The summons cut her short — Lord Martindale ran up to hasten her; a fervent embrace — she was gone!

And Violet, with worn-out strength and spirits, remained to find how desolate she was — left behind in dreary summer London.

There was nothing for it but to be as foolish as in old times, to lie down on the sofa and cry herself to sleep. She was a poor creature, after all, and awoke to weariness and head-ache, but to no repining; for she had attained to a spirit of thankfulness and content. She lay dreamily, figuring to herself Arthur enjoying himself on the moors and mountains, till Helvellyn's own purple cap came to brighten her dreams.

CHAPTER XXII.

Sigh no more, lady, lady, sigh no more,
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on shore and one on land,
To one thing constant never.
Percy's Reliques.

"So, you say Miss Martindale has left town?"

"Yes; Violet writes me that the family passed through London, and took her to the continent on Tuesday."

"Then let Annette know she is to be ready to come with me to town on Monday. We shall see if it is the young lady's doing, or whether Mrs. Martindale intends to give herself airs with her father and sister."

"Poor dear," sighed the good care-worn mother, "I do long to hear of her; but may I not write first? I should not like to get the dear child into trouble."

"On no account write, or we shall have some excuse about pre-engagements. I shall take Annette at once, and see with my own eyes. Martindale can never have the face to hinder her from asking her own sister to stay in the house, when once she is there."

"I hope he is kind to her!" said Mrs. Moss. "I long to hear whether she is quite recovered; and she says so little of herself. She will be glad to see her sister, and yet, one does not like to seem pushing."

"Never you mind," said the acute, sharp-faced attorney, putting her aside as if she was presuming beyond her sphere; "only you get Annette ready. Since we found such a match for Violet, she is bound to help off her sisters; and as to Annette, a jaunt is just what is wanting to drive that black coat out of her head. I wish he had never come near the place. The girl might have had the Irish captain, if she had not been running after him and his school. Tell her to be ready on Monday."

Meek Mrs. Moss never dared to question her husband's decision; and she had suffered too much anxiety on her daughter's account, not to rejoice in the prospect of a trustworthy report, for Violet's letters were chiefly descriptions of her children.

There was much soreness in the Moss family respecting Violet, and two opinions with regard to her; some inclining to believe her a fine lady, willing to discard her kindred; others thinking her not a free agent, but tyrannized over by Miss Martindale, and neglected by her husband. So Annette, who had pined and drooped under the loss of the twin-like companionship of her sister, was sent out as on an adventure in much trepidation and mysterious dread of Captain Martindale, by no means consistent with the easy good nature of his days of courtship. And thus her first letter was written and received with such feelings as attend that of an explorer of a new country.

"Cadogan-place, August 19th.

"Well, dearest Mamma, I am writing from Violet's house. Yes, she is her own sweet self, our precious flower still — nobody must think anything else — she is not changed one bit, except that she is terribly pale and thin; but she calls herself quite well, and says that if I had seen her when

Johnny was five weeks old, I should give her credit now. But Matilda will say I cannot write a comprehensible letter, so I will begin regularly.

"We slept at uncle Christopher's, and after an early breakfast walked here. The man did not think his mistress could see any one, but when he heard who we were, showed us to the drawing-room, and there was Violet, quite alone, breakfasting by herself, for he is gone to Scotland! Poor dear girl! When she saw us, she gave a little scream, and flew up to me, clinging round my neck, and sobbing as she did on her wedding day; it was as if the two years were nothing. However, in a moment, she composed herself, and said it was silly, but there was still a sob in her throat, and she was shy and constrained as she used to be with papa, in old times. She says she would not tell us Captain Martindale was going to Scotland, because of not tantalizing us with his passing so near, but I fear it is that she will not confess how often she is left alone. I am so glad we are come, now he is out of the way. She has asked us to stay while papa has to be in London, and I shall, but papa finds it more convenient to sleep at uncle Christopher's. If we are not here oftener, I am sure it is no fault of hers; and her husband cannot be displeased with this little visit — at least he ought not. She sent for the children; the babe was asleep, but Johnnie came, and oh! how curious it seemed to hear the voice calling her mamma, and see the little creature holding out his arms to go to her. I felt, indeed, how long we have been apart — it was our own Violet, and yet some one else. You would have been amused to see how altered she was by having her son in her arms; how the little morsel seemed to give her confidence, and the shy stiffness went away, and she looked so proud and fond, and smiled and spoke with ease. There was the dear little fair fellow standing on her lap, leaning against her shoulder, with his arm round her neck, hiding his face when I looked at him *too* much. She said he was puzzled not to see the aunt he knew, and how I grudged his knowing any aunt better than

me! They do look lovely together, and so much alike; but I could cry to see them both so white and wan; not a shade of her pretty colour on her cheek, and the little darling so very tiny and weak, though he is as clever as possible, and understands all you say to him. If I had but got them both in our fresh north countree!

"Papa could not stay, and as soon as he was gone, she set her boy down on the sofa, and threw her arms round my neck, and we were like wild things — we kissed, and screamed, and laughed, and cried, till poor Johnnie was quite frightened. 'Now, Annette, come and see,' said Violet, and took me upstairs to the nursery, and there, half waking, under the archway of her cradle, lay, like a little queen, that beautiful creature, Helen, opening her black eyes just as we came up, and moving her round arms. How I longed for mamma to see her, and to see Violet's perfect look of happiness as she lifted her out and said, 'Now, is not she worth seeing?' and then Sarah came up. Violet says Sarah threatened to go away, when there were two to be always racketing, but when it came to the point, could not leave Johnnie, whom she keeps in great order, and treats with much ceremony, always calling him Master John. She believes Sarah disapproves of poor Helen altogether, as an intruder upon Johnnie's comfort; and she is quite savage at admiration of her, as if it was a slight on him; but she has turned out an admirable nurse, in her own queer way. Such a morning as we have had, chattering so fast! all about you all. I am sure she loves us as much as ever, and I do not believe she is unhappy. She talks of her husband as if they were happy, and he has given her such quantities of pretty things, and I hear of so much that seems as if she was on comfortable terms with them all. I am satisfied about her, pray be so too, dear Mamma.

"I am writing while waiting for her to drive to fetch my things from uncle Christopher's —. She tells me to finish without minding her visitor — I was interrupted by Sarah's bringing Johnnie down, and he was very good with me, but

presently a gentleman was announced, without my catching his name. I feared Johnnie would cry, but he sprang with delight, and the stranger saying, 'Ha! master, you recollect me?' took him in his arms. I said my sister would come directly, and he gave a good-natured nod, and muttered half to himself, 'Oh! another of the genus Viola. I am glad of it.' I cannot make him out; he must be a relation, or one of the other officers. Violet did not know he was there, and came in with the baby in her arms; he stepped towards her, saying, 'So you have set up another! Man or woman?' and then asked if she was another flower. Violet coloured, as she spoke low, and said, 'Her name is Helen.' I must ask Violet the meaning, for he looked gravely pleased, and answered gratefully, 'That is very good of you.' 'I hope she will deserve it,' Violet said, and was introducing me, but he said Johnnie had done him that honour. He has been talking of Captain Martindale (calling him Arthur), and telling curious things he has seen in Ireland. He is very amusing, bluff, and odd, but as if he was a distinguished person. Now I see that Violet *is* altered, and grown older — he seems to have such respect for, and confidence in her; and she so womanly and self-possessed, entering into his clever talk as Matilda would, yet in the simple way she always had. You would be proud to see her now — her manners must be perfection, I should think; so graceful and dignified, so engaging and quiet. I wish Louisa had seen her. What are they talking of now?

'*Violet.* — How did you find Pallas Athene?

'*Unknown.* — Alas, poor Pallas! With the judgment of the cockney who buttered his horse's hay, the ragged boy skinned her mice and plucked her sparrows in my absence. The consequence was her untimely end. I was met by my landlady with many a melancholy 'Ah, Sir!' and actually the good creature had had her stuffed.

'*Violet.* — Poor Pallas! then the poor boy has lost his employment?

'*Unknown.* — Happily, his honesty and his grief so

worked upon my landlady, that she has taken him as an errand boy. So that, in fact, Minerva may be considered to have been the making of his fortune.'

"I leave this for a riddle for the sisters. I am longing to ask Violet who this gentleman is who seems to know *all the negroes so well.* (Scratched out.) What nonsense I have written! I was listening to some letters they were reading from the Mr. Martindale in the West Indies. Violet tells me to finish with her dearest love.

"Your most affectionate,

"A. Moss.

"P.S. — He will come to-morrow to take us to a private view of the Royal Academy, before the pictures are removed."

The same post carried a letter from Violet to her husband, communicating the arrival of her guests, and telling him she knew that he could not wish her not to have Annette with her for these few days, and that it *did* make her very happy.

Having done this, she dismissed doubts, and, with a clear conscience, gave herself up to the enjoyment of her sister's visit, each minute of which seemed of diamond worth. Perhaps the delights were the more intense from compression; but it was a precious reprieve when Arthur's answer came, rejoicing at Violet's having a companion, and hoping that she would keep her till his return, which he should not scruple to defer, since she was so well provided for. He had just been deliberating whether he could accept an invitation to the Highlands.

If the wife was less charmed than her sister, she knew that, under any circumstances, she would have had to consent, after the compliment had been paid of asking whether she could spare him; and it was compensation enough that he should have voluntarily extended her sister's visit.

Annette, formerly the leader of her younger sister, was often pleasantly surprised to find her little Violet become like her elder, and that not only from situation, but in mind.

With face and figure resembling Violet's, but of a less uncommon order, without the beauteous complexion and the natural grace, now enhanced by living in the best society, Annette was a very nice-looking, lady-like girl, of the same refined tone of mind and manners; and having had a longer space of young ladyhood, she had more cultivation in accomplishments and book knowledge, her good taste saving her from being spoilt, even by her acquiescence in Matilda's superiority. She saw, however, that Violet had more practical reflection, and though in many points simple and youthful, was more of a woman than herself; and it was with that sweet, innocent feeling, which ought not to bear the same name as pride, that she exulted in the superiority of her beloved sister. Selfish jealousies or petty vanities were far from her; it was like a romance to hear Violet describe the splendours of Martindale, or the gaieties of London; and laugh over the confession of the little perplexities as to proprieties, and the mistakes and surprises, which she trusted she had not betrayed.

Still Violet missed the power of fully reciprocating her sister's confidence. Annette laid open every home interest and thought, but Violet had no right to disclose the subjects that had of late engrossed her, and at every turn found a separation, something on which she must not be communicative.

The view of the Exhibition was happily performed under Mr. Fotheringham's escort. Annette, thanks to Lord St. Erme's gallery, had good taste in pictures; she drew well, and understood art better than her sister, who rejoiced in bringing out her knowledge, and hearing her converse with Percy. They had the rooms to themselves, and Annette was anxious to carry away the outline of one or two noted pictures. While she was sketching, Percy wandered to another part of the room, and stood fixedly before a picture. Violet came to see what he was looking at. It was a fine one by Landseer of a tiger submitting to the hand of the keeper,

with cat-like complacency, but the glare of the eye and curl of the tail manifesting that its gentleness was temporary.

"It may be the grander animal," muttered he; "but less satisfactory for domestic purposes."

"What did you say?" asked Violet, thinking it addressed to her.

"That is a presumptuous man," he said, pointing to the keeper. "If he trusts in the creature's affection, some day he will find his mistake."

He flung himself round, as if he had done with the subject, and his tone startled Violet, and showed her that more was meant than met the ear. She longed to tell him that the creature was taming itself, but she did not dare, and he went back to talk to Annette, till it ended in his promising to come to-morrow, to take them to the Ellesmere gallery.

"That 's the right style of woman," soliloquized Percy, as he saw the carriage drive off, "Gentleness, meekness, and a dash of good sense, is the recipe for a rational female — otherwise, she is a blunder of nature. The same stamp as her sister, I see; nothing wanting, but air and the beauty, which, luckily for Arthur, served for his bait."

When he came, according to appointment, Annette was in the drawing-room, unable to desist from touching and retouching her copy of her nephew's likeness, though Violet had long ago warned her to put it away, and to follow her up to dress.

He carried the portrait to the light. "M. Piper," he read. "That little woman! That mouth is in better drawing than I could have thought her guilty of."

"Oh! those are Lord St. Erme's touches," said unconscious Annette. "He met Miss Martindale taking it to be framed, and he improved it wonderfully. He certainly understood the little face, for he even wrote verses on it."

Here Violet entered, and Annette had to hurry away for her bonnet. Percy stood looking at the drawing.

"So, Johnnie has a new admirer," he said.

Violet was sorry that he should hear of this; but she laughed, and tried to make light of it.

"I hear he is in Germany."

"Yes; with his sister and their aunt."

"Well," said Percy, "it may do. There will be no collision of will, and while there is *one* to submit, there is peace. A tigress can be generous to a puppy dog."

"But, indeed, I do not think it likely."

"If she is torturing him, that is worse."

Violet raised her eyes pleadingly, and said, in a low, mournful tone: "I do not like to hear you speak so bitterly."

"No," he said, "it is not bitterness. That is over. I am thankful to have broken loose, and to be able to look back on it calmly, as a past delusion. Great qualities ill regulated are fearful things; and though I believe trials will in time teach her to bring her religious principle to bear on her faults, I see that it was an egregious error to think that she could be led."

He spoke quietly, but Violet could not divest herself of the impression that there was more acute personal feeling than he was aware of. In the Ellesmere gallery, he led them to that little picture of Paul Potter's, where the pollard willows stand up against the sunset sky, the evening sunshine gleaming on their trunks, upon the grass, and gilding the backs of the cows, while the placid old couple look on at the milking, the hooded lady shading her face with her fan.

"There 's my notion of felicity," said he.

"Rather a Dutch notion," said Violet.

"Don't despise the Dutch," said Percy. "Depend upon it, that respectable retired burgomaster and his vrow never had words, as we Brogden folk say."

"I think you would find that very stupid," said Violet.

"Not I," said Percy. "When I want to pick a quarrel, I can get it abroad."

"When?" said Annette, smiling.

"Yes, I like to keep my teeth and claws sharpened," said

Percy; "but one wants repose at home. That burgomaster is my model."

He continued to find sights for them, showing Violet more lions of London than had ever come in her way. One day, when a thunder-storm hindered their going to the Zoological Gardens, he stayed the whole afternoon reading to them. In the midst, Violet thought of last September's storm; she looked up — an idea flashed upon her!

"How delightful! How well they suit! I shall have my Annette close to me! They can marry at once! My father will be satisfied. How happy they will be! It will be the repose he wants. Dear Annette, what will she not be under his training!" The joyous impulse was to keep him to dinner; but she had scruples about inviting him in Arthur's absence, and therefore only threw double warmth into her farewells. Her spirits were up to nonsense pitch, and she talked and laughed all the evening with such merriment as Annette had hardly ever known in her.

But when she was alone, and looked her joy in the face, she was amazed to find how she had been forgetting Theodora, whose affairs had lately been uppermost. Annette might be worth a hundred Theodoras: but that did not alter right and justice.

If Theodora was accepting the Earl! Violet knew he was at Baden; he could not yet have been dismissed: and the sister-in-law had proved a disappointing correspondent, her nature being almost as averse to letter-writing as was Arthur's. Let her marry him, and all would be well. The question, however, really lay between Percy and Annette themselves: and Violet thought he had made a wise discovery in preferring her gentle, yielding sister to the former lady of his choice. Matters might take their course; Arthur would be gratified by this testimony to her family's perfections: John would rejoice in whatever was for his friend's real happiness; to herself, in every way, it would be complete felicity.

Still she hesitated. She had heard of pique driving persons to make a fresh choice, when a former attachment appeared obliterated by indignation, only to revive too late, and to be the misery of all parties. Percy's late words, harsh when he fancied them indifferent, made her doubtful whether it might not be so in his case. In his sound principle she had entire confidence, but he might be in error as to the actual state of his sentiments; and she knew that she should dread, for the peace of mind of all parties, his first meeting, as her sister's husband, with either Miss Martindale or the Countess of St. Erme.

She decided that Annette ought to hear the whole, so as act with her eyes open. If she had been engaged, she should never have heard what was past, but she should not encourage him while ignorant of the circumstances; and, these known, Violet had more reliance on her judgment than on her own. The breach of confidence being thus justified, Violet resolved, and as they sat together late in the evening, found an opportunity of beginning the subject. "We used to expect a closer connexion with him, or I should never have learnt to call him Percy —"

"You told me about poor Mr. Martindale."

"Yes, but this was to have been a *live* connexion. He was engaged to Theodora."

Violet was satisfied that the responding interjection was more surprised and curious than disappointed. She related the main features of the story, much to Annette's indignation. "Why, Violet, you speak as if you were fond of her!"

"That I am. If you knew how noble and how tender she can be! So generous when most offended! Oh! no one can know her without a sort of admiring love and pity."

"I do not understand. To me she seems inexcusable."

"No, no, indeed Annette! She has had more excuse than almost any one. It makes one grieve for her to see how the worse nature seems to have been allowed to grow beyond her power, and how it is like something rending

her, when right and wrong struggle together for the mastery."

So many questions ensued, that Violet found her partial disclosure had rendered the curtain over Martindale affairs far less impenetrable; but she had spoken no sooner than was needful, for the very next morning's post brought an envelope, containing a letter for Miss Moss, and a few lines addressed to herself: —

"My dear Mrs. Martindale, — Trust me. I have discovered my error, and have profited by my lesson. Will you give the enclosed to your sister? I know you will act as kindly as ever by

"Yours, &c.,
"A. P. F."

So soon! Violet had not been prepared for this. She gasped with wonder and suspense, as she laid the letter before the place where Annette had been sitting, and returned to her seat as a spectator, though far from a calm one: that warm-hearted note had made her wishes his earnest partisans, and all her pulses throbbed with the desire that Annette might decide in favour of him; but she thought it wrong to try to influence her, and held her peace, though her heart leapt into her mouth at her sister's exclamation on seeing the letter, and her cheeks glowed when the flush darted into Annette's.

She glanced in a sort of fright over the letter, then looked for help to Violet, and held it to her. "Oh, Violet! do you know?"

"Yes, I have a note myself. My darling Annette!"

Annette threw herself down by her side, and sat on the floor, studying her face while she read the note, which thus commenced: —

"My dear Miss Moss, — You will say that our acquaintance is too short to warrant my thus addressing you; but your sister knows me as well as most people; and in knowing your sister, and seeing your resemblance to her, I know

you. If AM = VM, and VM = Wordsworth's 'spirit, yet a woman too,' then AM = the same."

From this curious opening he proceeded to a more ordinary and very earnest entreaty for her consent to his applying to her father.

"Well, Violet!"

"How exactly like him!"

"How highly he does esteem you!" said Annette; "but if he thinks me like you he would find his mistake. After what you told me — so soon! Oh, I wish it had not happened! Violet, do tell me what to do."

"I don't think any one can advise in a matter like this."

"Oh! don't say so, Violet; you know the people, and I don't. Pray say something."

"He is a most excellent, admirable person," said Violet, in an unmeaning tone.

"Yes, I know that, but —"

"Really, I think nothing but your own feeling should decide."

"Ah! you did not hesitate when you were asked!" said Annette, sighing; and Violet at once blushed, smiled, and sighed, as she spoke her quick conscious "No, no!"

"Such a romance cannot always be expected," said Annette, a little mournfully. "He is everything estimable, in spite of his oddness. But then, this affair — so recent! Violet! (impatiently) what *do* you think? what do you wish?"

"What I wish? To have my own Annette near me. For two such people to belong to each other! Don't you know what I like? But the question is what you wish."

"Yes!" sighed Annette.

"I don't think you wish it much," said Violet, trying to get a view of her face.

"I don't know whether I ought to make up my mind. I am not much inclined to anything. But I dare say it would turn out well. I do like him very much. But Miss Martindale! Now, Violet, will you not tell me what you think? Take pity on me."

"Annette," said Violet, not without effort, "I see you have not the feeling that would make you unhappy in giving him up, so I may speak freely. I am afraid of it. I cannot be certain that he is so completely cured of his old attachment as he supposes himself to be while the anger is fresh. He is as good as possible — quite sincere, and would never willingly pain you, whatever he may feel. But his affection for Theodora was of long standing; and without any one's fault there might be worries and vexations —"

"Yes, yes," said Annette, in a voice that re-assured her.

"I think it wiser not, and perhaps more honourable to Theodora. Hitherto I have been wishing that it might yet be made up again. If you had been disposed that way, I should have been anxious, — as you seem doubtful, I fancy it would be safer —"

"O, Violet, I am so glad! It is a great relief to me."

"But, you know, it is only I that say so."

"Better you than a hundred! My doubt was this. You know there are a great many of us, and papa wants to see us well married. He has talked more about it since you went. Now this is not romantic; but I was considering whether, for the sake of the rest, I ought not to try whether I could like him. But what you have said sets me quite at ease in refusing him."

"Poor Percy!" said Violet. "I am afraid he will be vexed."

"And it is a great compliment, though that is to you. He takes me on trust from you."

"And he took me on trust from John," said Violet. "I wish he had known you before Theodora."

"I only hope papa will never hear of it," said Annette, shrinking. "How fortunate that he was not here. I shall tell no one at home."

"If it had not been for Theodora," sighed Violet, "I know nothing that would have been more delightful. It was too charming to come true!"

"Violet," said Annette, with her face averted, "don't be sorry, for I could not have been glad of it now; though for their sakes I might have tried to work myself into the feeling. I cannot help telling you, though you will think it more wrong in me, for I shall never see *him* again, and he never said anything."

"I know whom you mean," whispered Violet, rightly divining it was Mr. Fanshawe.

"Don't call it anything," said Annette, with her head drooping. "I would not have told even you, but to console you about this. Nothing ever passed, and I was silly to dwell on the little things they laughed at me about; but I cannot help thinking that if he had seen any prospect —"

"I wonder if John could —" Violet checked herself.

"O, don't say anything about it!" cried Annette, frightened. "It may be only my foolish fancy — but I cannot get it out of my mind. You see I have no one to talk over things with now you are gone. I have lost my pair in you, so I am solitary among them; and perhaps that has made me think of it the more."

"Dearest! But still I think you ought to try to draw away your mind from it."

"You do not think I ought to try to like Mr. Fotheringham?"

"Indeed, under present circumstances, I could not wish that."

"But do you think me very wrong for considering whether I could? I hope not, dear Violet," said Annette, who shared her sister's scrupulous, self-distrustful character, and had not, like her, been taught, by stern necessity, to judge for herself.

"No, indeed," said Violet; "but, since that is settled, he ought to know it at once, and not to be kept in suspense."

It was not till after much affectionate exhortation that Violet could rouse her sister from talking rather piteously over the perplexity it would have been if his case or hers had

been otherwise, arguing to excuse herself in her own eyes for the notion of the marriage for expediency, and describing the displeasure that the knowledge of the rejection would produce at home. It was the first time she had had to act for herself, and either she could not resolve to begin, or liked to feel its importance. Perhaps she was right in saying that Mr. Fotheringham would be disappointed if he supposed her Violet's equal; for though alike in lowliness, amiability, and good sense, she had not the same energy and decision.

At last the letter was begun, in the style of Matilda and the *Polite Letter Writer* combined, though the meek-spirited Annette peeped through in the connecting links of the set phrases. Violet, who was appealed to at every stage, would fain have substituted the simple words in which Annette spoke her meaning; but her sister was shocked. Such ordinary language did not befit the dignity of the occasion nor Matilda's pupil; and Violet, as much over-ruled as ever by respect for her elder sisters, thought it an admirable composition.

"May I see yours?" asked Annette, resting before making her fair copy.

"And welcome, but it is not worthy of yours."

"'My dear Mr. Fotheringham, — I wish with all my heart it could be — I am very sorry it must not. Pray say nothing to my father: it would only put her to needless pain. I beg your pardon for not being able to do anything for you. You know how glad I should have been if I had not been obliged to perceive that it would not be really right or kind to either. Only do let me thank you for liking my dear sister, and forgive us if you are grieved. I am very, very sorry.

"'Yours, very sincerely,
"'V. H. Martindale.'"

Annette raised her eyes in surprise. "Ah!" said Violet, "it is of no use for me to try to write like Matilda. I did

once, but I am not clever enough; it looked so silly and affected, that I have been ashamed to remember it ever since. I must write in the only way I can."

Her sister wanted to tear up her letter as a piece of affectation, but this she would not allow. It made her feel despairing to think of spending two hours more over it, and she hoped that she would be satisfied with the argument that the familiar style employed by Mrs. Martindale towards an old friend might not be suited to Annette Moss when rejecting his suit.

Each sentence underwent a revision, till Violet, growing as impatient as was in her nature, told her at last that he would think more of the substance than of the form.

Next, she had to contend against Annette's longing to flee home at once, by Theodora's own saying, "London was wide enough for both;" and more effectually by suggesting that a sudden departure would be the best means of proclaiming the adventure. It was true enough that Mr. Fotheringham was not likely to molest her. No more was heard of him till, two days after, the owl's provider brought a parcel with a message, that Mr. Fotheringham had given up his lodging and was going to Paris. It contained some books and papers of John's, poor little Pallas Athene herself, stuffed, and directed to Master J. Martindale, and a book in which, under his sister's name, he had written that of little Helen. Violet knew he had intended making some residence at Paris, to be near the public libraries, and she understood this as a kind, forgiving farewell. She could understand his mortification, that he, after casting off the magnificent Miss Martindale, should be rejected by this little humble country girl; and she could not help thinking herself ungrateful, so that the owl, which she kept in the drawing-room, as the object of Johnnie's tender strokings, always seemed to have a reproachful expression in its round glass eyes.

The hope of seeing the expediency of her decision waxed fainter, when she received the unexpected honour of a

letter from Lord Martindale, who, writing to entrust her with some commission for John, added some news. "I have had the great pleasure of meeting with my cousin, Hugh Martindale," he said; "who, since the death of his wife, has so overworked himself in his large town parish, as to injure his eyesight, and has been ordered abroad for his health. It does not appear that he will ever be fit to return to his work at Fieldingsby, and I am in hopes of effecting an exchange which may fix him at Brogden in the stead of Mr. Wingfield. When you are of my age, you will understand the pleasure I have in returning to old times. Theodora has likewise been much with him, and I trust may be benefited by his advice. At present she has not made up her mind to give any definite answer to Lord St. Erme, and since I believe she hesitates from conscientious motives, I am the less inclined to press her, as I think the result will be in his favour. I find him improve on acquaintance. I am fully satisfied with his principles and temper, he has extensive information, and might easily become a valuable member of society. His sister, Lady Lucy, spends much of her time with us, and appears to be an amiable pleasing girl."

Lord Martindale evidently wished it to be forgotten that he had called Lord St. Erme absurd-looking.

Violet sighed, and tried to counterbalance her regrets by hopes that John would have it in his power to patronise his chaplain. However, these second-hand cares did not hinder her from thriving and prospering so, that she triumphed in the hopes of confuting the threat that she would not recover in London, and she gloried in the looks with which she should meet Arthur. A dozen times a-day she told her little ones that papa was coming home, till Johnnie learnt to repeat it; and then she listened in ecstasy as the news took a fresh charm from his lips.

She went to meet Arthur at the station; but instead of complimenting her on the renewed carnation of her cheeks, as perhaps, in her pretty conjugal vanity, she had expected, when she had taken such pains with her pink ribbons, he

gazed straight before him, and presently said, abruptly, "Is your sister here?"

Had she been displeasing him the whole time? She only breathed a faint "Yes."

"Is Fotheringham in town?"

"No; he is gone to Paris."

"Then it is humbug, as I thought. I met that precious Miss Gardner in the train going to Worthbourne, and she would have me believe you were getting up a match between those two? A fine story, — not a year since he proposed to Theodora! There was she congratulating me on the satisfaction it must be to Mrs. Martindale!"

"So she wanted to make mischief between us," said Violet, much hurt.

"Mischief is meat and drink to her. But not a jot did I believe, I tell you, silly child. You are not wasting tears on that crocodile tongue! I had a mind to tell her to her face that Percy is made of different stuff; and for my own Violet blossom —"

The tears dropped bright and happy. "Though, dear Arthur, it was true, as far as Percy was concerned. Annette has had to refuse him."

"A wise girl!" exclaimed Arthur, in indignant surprise. "But Percy! I could not have believed it. Why would she not have him?"

"Chiefly from thinking it not right to accept him. I hope I did not do wrong in telling her all about it. I thought it only fair, and she did not care enough for him to make the refusal an effort."

"I should think not! The fickle dog. To go and take up with — No disrespect to Annette, — but after Theodora! So soon, too!"

"I fancied it more pique than inconstancy. There is so much anger about him that I suspect there is more affection than he knows."

"And you think that mends matters," said Arthur, laughing. "Well, I hope Theodora will marry St. Erme at once,

so as to serve him right. I am sure she will if she hears of this."

"And I am afraid Miss Gardner will write to her."

"That she will, with nice histories of you and me and Annette. And she will tell them at Worthbourne till old Sir Antony disinherits Percy. No more than he deserves!"

She might well be glad of the part she had taken, now that she found her husband so much more alive to the affront to his sister than she had expected. He was in high good humour, and talked merrily of his expedition, proceeding even to such a stretch of solicitude as to say he supposed "the brats were all right, as he had heard nothing of them."

His greeting to Annette was warm and cordial; he complimented her on her sister's recovered looks, and tried to extort a declaration that she looked just like what she had been when he took her from Wrangerton. Annette peeped out under her eyelashes, smiled, and shook her head timidly.

"Ha! What 's your treason, Miss Annette? Does not she look as well as ever?"

"Better, in some ways," said Annette, looking at Violet, glowing and smiling, with her husband's hand on her shoulder.

"And what in others?"

"I like to look at her better than ever, but I cannot say she is not paler and thinner."

"Yes, and sober and matronly. That I am!" said Violet, drawing herself up. "I must stand on my dignity now I have two children. Don't I look old and wise, Annette?"

"Not a bit now," said Annette.

There was an end of Annette's doubt and dread of her grand brother-in-law. He talked and laughed, took her on pleasant expeditions, and made much of her with all his ready good nature, till her heart was quite won. She did not leave them till just as they were departing for Wind-

sor, and as she looked back from her railway carriage, at Violet and her husband, arm-in-arm, she sighed a sigh on her own account, repented of as soon as heaved, as she contrasted her own unsatisfactory home with their happiness.

But the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and Annette little guessed at the grief that lurked in the secret springs of her sister's joy, increasing with her onward growth in the spirit that brought her sure trust and peace. It was the want of fellowship with her husband, in her true and hidden life. She could not seek counsel or comfort from above, she could not offer prayer or thanksgiving, she could not join in the highest Feast, without finding herself left alone, in a region whither he would not follow. It was a weariness to him. In the spring she had had hopes. At Easter, an imploring face, and timid "Won't you come?" had made him smile, and say he was not so good as she, then sigh, and half promise, "Next time, when he had considered." But next time, he had had no leisure for thinking; she should do as she liked with him when they got into the country. And since that, some influence that she could not trace, seemed, as she knew by the intuition of her heart, rather than the acknowledgment of her mind, to have turned him away; the distaste and indifference were more evident, and he never gave her an opening for leading to any serious subject. It was this that gave pain even to her prayers, and added an acuter pang to every secret anxiety.

"When his children are older, and he feels that they look up to him," thought Violet, hopefully, and in the meantime she prayed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Not so, bold knight, no deed of thine
Can ever win my hand;
That hope, poor youth, thou must resign,
For barriers 'twixt us stand.
Yet what doth part us I will now reveal,
Nor, noblest one, from thee the truth conceal.
FOUQUE.

ARTHUR guessed rightly. Miss Gardner's first leisure was spent in writing her tidings to Theodora.

It was on a strange state of mind that they fell. Theodora had gone abroad, softened and conscious of her faults, but her indomitable will boiling up at each attempt to conquer them; knowing that her fate hung in the balance, but helpless in the power of her own pride and temper. Miserable, and expecting to be more wretched, her outward demeanour, no longer checked by Violet, was more than ever harsh, capricious, and undutiful, especially under her present deprivation of the occupations that had hitherto been channels of kindly feeling.

She was less patient than formerly with her aunt, who was in truth more trying. Quickly gathering the state of affairs with regard to Lord St. Erme, she was very angry with Lord Martindale for not having consulted her, and at the same time caressed her great-niece beyond endurance. Besides, it was unbearable to hear sweet Violet scoffed at. Theodora spoke hastily in her defence; was laughed at for having been gained over; replied vehemently; and then repented of losing temper with one so aged and infirm. Her attention to Mrs. Nesbit had been one of her grounds of self-complacency; but this had now failed her — distance was the only means of keeping the peace, and Theodora left her chiefly to her companion, Mrs. Garth, a hard-looking, military dame, who seemed so well able to take care of herself, that there was none of the compassion that had caused Theodora to relieve poor little Miss Piper.

It was not long before Lord St. Erme persuaded his aunt that her tour in Germany would not be complete without a

visit to Baden-Baden. Mrs. Delaval and Lady Martindale immediately began to be as intimate as was possible with the latter. Theodora intended to stand aloof, and to be guarded and scornful; but Lady Lucy was such an engaging, affectionate, honest-hearted little thing, regarding Miss Martindale with all her brother's enthusiastic devotion, and so grateful for the slightest notice, that it really was impossible to treat her with the requisite cold dignity.

And to admit Lady Lucy to her friendship was much the the same thing as admitting the brother. "St. Erme" was the one engrossing subject of the young girl's thoughts and discourse, and it was soon plain that not a conversation passed but was reported to him. If Theodora expressed an opinion, "St. Erme's" remarks on it were certain to be brought to her the next day; if a liking or a wish, he was instantly taking measures for its gratification. She might try to keep him at a distance, but where was the use of it when, if his mustached self was safely poetizing in the Black Forest, his double in blue muslin was ever at her elbow?

By and bye it was no longer a mustached self. The ornaments were shaved off, and she heartily wished them on again. What could be said when Lucy timidly begged to know how she liked the change in St. Erme's face, and whether she shared her regrets for his dear little mustache? Alas! such a sacrifice gave him a claim, and she felt as if each departed hair was a mesh in the net to ensnare her liberty.

And what could she say when Lucy *would* talk over his poems, and try to obtain her sympathy in the matter of that cruel review which had cut the poor little sister to the heart? It had been so sore a subject in London, that she could not then bear to speak of it; and now, treating it like a personal attack on his character, she told how "beautifully St. Erme bore it," and wanted Miss Martindale to say how unjust and shocking it was. Yet Miss Martindale actually, with a look

incomprehensible to poor Lucy, declared that there was a great deal of truth in it.

However, in process of time, Lucy came back reporting that her brother thought so too, and that he had gathered many useful hints from it; but that he did not mean to attend to poetry so much, he thought it time to begin practical life; and she eagerly related his schemes for being useful and distinguishing himself.

It was not easy to help replying and commenting on, or laughing at, plans which showed complete ignorance of English life, and then Theodora found herself drawn into discussions with Lord St. Erme himself, who took her suggestions, and built his projects with a reference to her, as his understood directress and assistant; till she grew quite frightened at what she had let him take for granted, and treated him with a fresh fit of coldness and indifference, soon thawed by his sister. She could not make up her mind to the humiliating confession by which alone she could have dismissed him, and the dominion she should enjoy with him appeared more and more tempting as she learnt to know him better, and viewed him as a means of escape from her present life. If it had not been for recollections of Violet, she would have precipitated the step, in order to end her suspense, but that perfect trust that she would not accept him unless she could do so with a clear conscience always held her back.

It was at this juncture that, one day when walking with her father, there was a sudden stop at the sight of another elderly gentleman. "Ha! Hugh!" "What, you here, Martindale!" were mutually exclaimed, there was an ardent shaking of hands, and she found herself introduced to a cousin, whom she had not seen since she was a child.

He and her father had been like brothers in their boyhood, but the lines they had since taken had diverged far and wide. The hard-working clergyman had found himself out of his element in visits to Martindale, had discontinued them, and almost even his correspondence, so that Lord

Martindale had heard nothing of his cousin since his wife's death, two years ago, till now, when he met him on the promenade at Baden, sent abroad to recruit his worn-out health and eye-sight.

All have either felt or beheld, how two such relations, on the verge of old age, meet and refresh themselves with looking back, beyond the tract of middle life, to the days shared together in youth! Lord Martindale had not looked so bright, nor talked and laughed so much for years, as over his boyish reminiscences, and his wanderings up and down the promenade with his cousin seemed as if nothing could terminate them.

Clergymen and school-loving young ladies have a natural affinity, and Theodora found a refuge from the Delavals and an opportunity for usefulness. She offered to read to cousin Hugh, she talked over parish matters, and after relieving her mind with a conversation on the question of how much the march of intellect ought to penetrate into country schools, it was wonderful how much more equable and comfortable she became. The return to the true bent of her nature softened her on every side; and without the least attempt to show off, she was so free from the morose dignity, with which she had treated her own family since going abroad, that Mr. Hugh Martindale could hardly believe the account of her strange ungovernable character, as it was laid before him by her father, in his wish for counsel.

He watched her anxiously, but made no attempt to force her confidence, and let her talk to him of books, school discipline, parish stories, and abstruse questions as much as she pleased, always replying in a practical, sobering tone, that told upon her, and soothed her almost like Violet's mild influence; and to her great delight, she made him quite believe in Violet's goodness, and wish to be acquainted with her.

But all the time, Lord St. Erme was treated as her acknowledged suitor. Perhaps Mr. Martindale thought it might be better if she were safely married; or, at any rate,

only knowing her personally as a high-minded person of much serious thought, he believed her to be conscientiously waiting to overcome all doubts, and honoured her scruples: while it might be, that the desire for his good opinion bound Theodora the more to Lord St. Erme, for with all her sincerity, she could not bear the idea of his discovering the part she was playing, at the very time she was holding such conversations on serious subjects. The true history of her present conduct was that she could not endure to be known as the rejected and forsaken of Mr. Fotheringham, and thus, though outwardly tamer, she was more melancholy at heart, fast falling into a state of dull resignation; if such a name can be applied to mere endurance of the consequences of her own pride and self-will.

Now came Jane Gardner's letter. Theodora read it through, then with calm contempt, she tore it up, lighted a taper, and burnt it to ashes.

"There, Jane!" said she, as it shrivelled, black and crackling, "there is all the heed I take. Violet would no more allow me to be supplanted than Percy could be inconstant."

Inconstant! Where was her right so to term him? Was he not released, not merely by the cold "Very well," which seemed to blister her lips in the remembrance, but by her whole subsequent course? That thought came like the stroke of a knife, and she stood motionless and stunned. Love of Percival Fotheringham was a part of herself! Certain from her confidence in Violet that Jane's news was untrue, the only effect of hearing it was to reveal to her like a flash that her whole heart was his. He had loved her in spite of her faults. Suppose he should do so still! Her spirits leapt up at this glimpse of forfeited unattainable joy; but she beheld a forlorn hope. At least she would restore herself to a condition in which she might meet him without despairing shame. The impulse was given, and eager to obey it, while it still buoyed her above the dislike to self-

abasement, she looked round for the speediest measure, caring little what it might be.

Her father was reading his letters in the next room, when, with flushed cheek, and voice striving for firmness, she stood before him, saying, "It is time to put an end to this. Will you let Lord St. Erme know that it cannot be?"

"Now, Theodora!" exclaimed the much astonished Lord Martindale, "what is the meaning of this?"

"It cannot be," repeated Theodora. "It must be put a stop to."

"What has happened? Have you heard anything to change your mind?"

"My mind is not changed, but I cannot have this going on."

"How is this? You have been encouraging him all this time, letting him come here —"

"I never asked him to come here," said Theodora, temper coming in, as usual.

"Theodora! Theodora! did I not entreat you to tell me what you wished, when I first heard of this in London? Could I get a reasonable answer from you?"

Theodora was silent.

"Do you know what the world thinks of young ladies who go on in this manner?"

"Let it think as it may, I cannot accept him, and you must tell him so, Papa —"

"No, indeed. I will not be responsible for such usage! It must be your own doing," said Lord Martindale, thoroughly displeased. "I should be ashamed to look him in the face!"

Theodora turned to leave the room.

"What are you going to do?" asked her father.

"I am going to write to Lord St. Erme."

"Come back, Theodora. I must know that you are not going to carry further this ill-usage of most excellent man, more sincerely attached to you than you deserve. I insist on knowing what you intend to say to him."

To insist was not the way to succeed with Theodora.

"I do not exactly know," said she.

"I wish I knew what to do with you!" sighed Lord Martindale, in anger, grief, and perplexity. "You seem to think that people's affections are made to serve for your vanity and sport, and when you have tormented them long enough, you cast them off!"

Theodora drew her head up higher, and swelled at the injustice. It was at that moment that Lord St. Erme entered the room. She went forward to meet him, and spoke at once. "I am glad you are here," said she, proudly pleased that her father should see her vindication from the charge of trifling. "You are come to hear what I had been desiring my father to tell you. I have used you very ill, and it is time to put a stop to it."

Lord St. Erme looked from her to her father in wonder and dismay.

"First understand," said Lord Martindale, "that this is no doing of mine; I am heartily grieved, but I will leave you. Perhaps you may prevail on this wilful girl —"

Theodora began a protest, and desired him to remain; but he would not, and she found herself alone with her bewildered lover.

"What is this? what have I done?" he began.

"You have done nothing," said she. "It is all my own fault. The truth will be a cure for your regrets, and I owe you an explanation. I was engaged to one whom I had known from childhood; but we disputed — my temper was headstrong. He rejected me, and I thought I scorned him, and we parted. You came in my way while I was angry, before I knew that I can never lose my feelings towards him. I know I have seemed to trifle with you; but false shame hindered me from confessing how matters really stood. You ought to rejoice in being freed from such as I am."

"But with time!" exclaimed Lord St. Erme, in broken words. "May I not hope that time and earnest endeavours —?"

"Hope nothing," said Theodora. "Every one would tell you you have had a happy escape."

"And is this all? My inspiration! — you who were awakening me to a sense of the greatness of real life — you who would have led me and aided me to a nobler course —"

"That is open to you, without the evils I should have entailed on you. I could never have returned your feelings, and it would have been misery for both. You will see it, when you come to your senses, and rejoice."

"Rejoice! If you knew how the thought of you is entwined in every aspiration, and for life."

"Do not talk so," said Theodora. "It only grieves me to see the pain I have given: but it would be worse not to break off at once."

"Must it be so?" said he, lingering before his fleeting vision.

"It must. The kindest thing by both of us is to cut this as short as possible."

"In that, as in all else, I obey. I know that a vain loiterer, like myself, had little right to hope for notice from one whose mind was bent on the noblest tasks of mankind. You have opened new views to me, and I had dared to hope you would guide me in them; but with you or without you, my life shall be spent in them."

"That will be some consolation for the way I have treated you," said Theodora.

His face lighted up. "My better angel!" he said, "I will be content to toil as the knights of old, hopelessly, save that if you hear of me no longer as the idle amateur, but as exerting myself for something serviceable, you will know it is for your sake."

"It had better be for something else," said Theodora, impatiently. "Do not think of me, nor delude yourself with imagining you can win me by any probation."

"I may earn your approval —"

"You will earn every one's," she interrupted. "Put mine out of your head. Think of life and duty, and their reward,

as they really are; and they will inspirit you better than any empty dream of me."

"It is vain to tell me so!" said the Earl, looking at her glancing eye and earnest countenance. "You will ever seem to beckon me forwards."

"Something better will beckon you by and by, if you will only begin. Life is horrid work—only endurable by looking after other people, and so you will find it. Now, let us have done with this. Wish your sister good bye for me, and tell her that I beg her to forgive me for the pain I have given you. I am glad you have her. She will make you happy — I have only tormented those I loved best; so you are better off with her. Good bye. Shake hands, to show that you forgive me."

"I will not harass you by pertinacity," said poor Lord St. Elme, submissively. "It has been a happy dream while I was bold enough to indulge in it. Farewell to it, though not, I trust, to its effects."

Lingering as he held her hand, he let it go; then, returning to the grasp, bent and kissed it; turned away, as if alarmed at his own presumption, and hastened from the room.

She flung herself into her father's chair to consider of seeing Lady Lucy, of writing to Violet, of breaking the tidings to her aunt, of speaking to her cousin Hugh; but no connected reflection could be summoned up — nothing but visions of an Athenian owl, and green cotton umbrella.

At length the sound of the opening door made her start up.

"Have I interrupted you?" asked her cousin. "I thought I should find your father here."

"I do not know where he is," said Theodora. "Can I do anything for you? Oh! I beg your pardon; I had forgotten it was time to read to you."

"You know I always hoped that you would not make it a burden."

"If you knew the relief it is to be of any sort of use," re-

turned she; hastily setting his chair, and fetching the books.

Perhaps her attention wandered while she read; for they had hardly finished before she looked up and said, "That always puts me in mind of Arthur's wife. The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is so entirely her adorning — her beauty only an accessory."

"Yes: I wish I knew her," said Mr. Martindale.

"Oh! how I wish she was here!" sighed Theodora.

"For any special reason?"

"Yes; I want her to soften and help me. She seems to draw and smooth away the evil, and to keep me from myself. Nothing is so dreary where she is."

"I should not have expected to hear you, at your age and with your prospects, talk of dreariness."

"That is all over," said Theodora. "I have told him that it cannot be. I am glad, for one reason, that I shall not seem to deceive you any more. Has papa told you what he thinks my history?"

"He has told me of your previous — affair."

"I wonder what is his view?"

"His view is one of deep regret; he thinks your tempers were incompatible."

Theodora laughed. "He has a sort of termagant notion of me."

"I am afraid you do no justice to your father's affection and anxiety."

"It is he who does me no justice," said Theodora.

"Indeed, I do not think that can be your sister's teaching," said Mr. Martindale.

"I wish she was here!" said Theodora, again. "But now you have heard my father's story, you shall hear mine;" and with tolerable fairness, she related the history of the last few months. The clergyman was much interested in the narrative of this high-toned mind, — "like sweet bells jangled," and listened with earnest and sorrowful attention. There was comfort in the out-pouring; and as she spoke, the better

spirit so far prevailed, that she increasingly took more blame to herself, and threw less on others. She closed her confession by saying, "You see, I may well speak of dreariness."

"Of dreariness for the present," was the answer; "but of hope. You put me in mind of some vision which I have read of, where safety and peace were to be attained by bowing to the dust, to creep beneath a gateway, the entrance to the glorious place. You seem to me in the way of learning that lesson."

"I have bent to make the avowal I thought I never could have spoken," said Theodora.

"And there is my hope of you. Now for the next step."

"The next! what is it?"

"Thankfully and meekly to accept the consequences of these sad errors."

"You mean this lonely, unsatisfactory life?"

"And this displeasure of your father."

"But, indeed, he misjudges me."

"Have you ever given him the means of forming a different judgment?"

"He has seen all. If I am distrusted, I cannot descend to justify myself."

"I am disappointed in you, Theodora. Where is your humility?"

With these words Mr. Martindale quitted her. He had divined that her feelings would work more when left to themselves, than when pressed, and so it proved.

The witness within her spoke more clearly, and dislike and loathing of her proceedings during the last year grew more strongly upon her. The sense of her faults had been latent in her mind for months past, but the struggle of her external life had kept it down, until now it came forth with an overpowering force of grief and self-condemnation. It was not merely her sins against Mr. Fotheringham and Lord St. Erme that oppressed her, it was the perception of the

wilful and rebellious life she had led, while making so high a profession.

Silently and sadly she wore through the rest of the day, unmolested by any remark from the rest of the family, but absorbed in her own thoughts, and the night passed in acute mental distress; with longings after Violet to soothe her, and to open to her hopes of the good and right way of peace.

With morning light, came the recollection that, after all, Violet would rejoice in what she had just done. Violet would call it a step in the right direction; and she had promised her further help from above and within, when once she should have had patience to take the right move, even in darkness. "She told me, if I put my trust aright, and tried to act in obedience, I should find a guide!"

And, worn out and wearied with the tossings of her mind, Theodora resolved to have recourse to the kind clergyman who had listened to her confidence. Perhaps he was the guide who would aid her to conquer the serpents that had worked her so much misery; and, after so much self-will, she felt that there would be rest in submitting to direction.

She sought him out, and joined his early walk.

"Help me," she said; "I repent, indeed I do. Teach me to begin afresh, and to be what I ought. I would do anything."

"Anything that is not required of you, Theodora, or anything that is?"

"Whatever you or Violet required of me," said she, "that I would do readily and gladly, cost me what it might."

"It is not for me to require anything," said Mr. Martindale. "What I advise you is to test the sincerity of your repentance, by humbling yourself to ask your father's forgiveness."

He watched her face anxiously, for his hopes of her almost might be said to depend upon this. It was one of those efforts which she made with apparent calmness. "You and Violet ask the same thing," she said; "I will."

"I am glad to hear you say this. I could not think you going on right while you denied him the full explanation of your conduct."

"Did you mean that I should tell him all?" exclaimed Theodora.

"It would be a great relief to his mind. Few fathers would have left you such complete liberty of action, consented to your engagement, and then acted so kindly and cautiously in not forcing on you this, for which he had begun to wish ardently. You have grieved him extremely, and you owe it to him to show that this has not all been caprice."

"I have promised," repeated Theodora.

"Your second effort," said Mr. Martindale, encouragingly.

They were nearly opposite an hotel, where a carriage was being packed. Theodora turned, he understood her, and they walked back; but before they could quit the main road, the travellers rolled past them. Lord St. Erme bowed. Theodora did not look up; but when past, asked if any one was with him?

"Yes; his sister."

"I am glad of it," said Theodora. "She is an excellent little thing, the very reverse of me."

Without failure of resolution, Theodora returned to breakfast, her mind made up to the effort, which was more considerable than can be appreciated, without remembering her distaste to all that bore the semblance of authority; and the species of proud reserve that had prevented her from avowing to her father her sentiments respecting Mr. Fotheringham, even in the first days of their engagement; and she was honest enough to feel that the manner, as well as the subject of conversation, must show the sincerity of her change. She would not let herself be affronted into perverseness or sullenness, but would try to imagine Violet looking on; and with this determination, she lingered in the breakfast-room after her mother and cousin had left it.

"Papa," said she, as he was leaving the room, "will you listen to me?"

"What now, Theodora?" said poor Lord Martindale; expecting some of those fresh perplexities, that made him feel the whole family to blame.

It was not encouraging, but she had made up her mind. "I have behaved very ill about all this, Papa; I want you to forgive me."

He came nearer to her, and studied her face, in dread lest there should be something behind. "I am always ready to forgive, and listen to you," he said sadly.

She perceived that she had indeed given him much pain, and was softened, and anxious for him to be comforted, by seeing that her fault, at least, was not the vanity and heartlessness that he supposed.

"It was very wrong of me to answer you as I did yesterday," she said. "I know it was my own fault that Lord St. Erme was allowed to follow us."

"And why did you consent?"

"I don't know. Yes, I do, though; but that makes it worse. It was because my perverse temper was vexed at your warning me," said Theodora, looking down, much ashamed.

"Then, you never meant to accept him!" exclaimed her father.

"No, not exactly that; I thought I might," said she, slowly, and with difficulty.

"Then, what has produced this alteration?"

"I will tell you," said she, recalling her resolution. "I did not know how much I cared for Percy Fotheringham. Yesterday, there came a foolish report about his forming another attachment. I know it was not true; but the misery it gave me, showed me that it would be sin and madness to engage myself to another."

Lord Martindale breathed more freely. "Forgive me for putting the question, it is a strange one to ask now: Were you really attached to Percy Fotheringham?"

"With my whole heart," answered Theodora, deliberately.

"Then, why, or how—"

"Because my pride and stubbornness were beyond what

any man could bear," she answered. "He did quite right; it would not have been manly to submit to my conduct. I did not know how bad it was till afterwards, nor how impossible it is that my feelings towards him should cease."

"And this is the true history of your treatment of Lord St. Erme?"

"Yes. He came at an unlucky moment of anger, when Violet was ill, and could not breathe her saving influence over me, and I fancied —. It was very wrong, and I was ashamed to confess what I have told you now."

"Have you given him this explanation?"

"I have."

"Well, I am better satisfied. He is a most generous person, and told me he had no reason to complain of you."

"Yes, he has a noble character. I am very sorry for the manner in which I have treated him, but there was nothing to be done but to put an end to it. I wish I had never begun it!"

"I wish so too!" said Lord Martindale. "He is grievously disappointed, and bears it with such generous admiration of you and such humility on his own part, that it went to my heart to talk to him, especially while feeling myself a party to using him so ill."

"He is much too good for me," said Theodora; "but I could not accept him while I contrasted him with what I have thrown away. I can only repent of having behaved so badly."

"Well! after all, I am glad to hear you speak in this manner," said her father.

"I know I have been much to blame," said Theodora, still with her head bent down and half turned away. "Ever since I was a child, I have been undutiful and rebellious. Being with Violet has gradually brought me to a sense of it. I do wish to make a fresh beginning, and to ask you to forgive and bear with me."

"My dear child!" And Lord Martindale stepped to her side, took her hand, and kissed her.

No more was needed to bring the drops that had long

been swelling in her eyes; she laid her head on his shoulder, and felt how much she had hitherto lost by the perverseness that had made her choose to believe her father cold and unjust.

There was another trial for the day. The departure of Lord St. Erme and his sister revealed the state of affairs to the rest of the world; Mrs. Delaval came to make Lady Martindale a parting visit, and to lament over their disappointment, telling how well Lord St. Erme bore it, and how she had unwillingly consented to his taking his sister with him to comfort him at that dull old place, Wrangerton.

Lady Martindale, as usual, took it very quietly. She never put herself into collision with her daughter, and did not seem to care about her freaks otherwise than as they affected her aunt. Mrs. Nesbit, who had thought herself on the point of the accomplishment of her favourite designs, was beyond measure vexed and incensed. She would not be satisfied without seeing Theodora, reproaching her, and insisting on hearing the grounds of her unreasonable conduct.

Theodora was silent.

Was it as her mother reported, but as Mrs. Nesbit would not believe, that she had so little spirit as to be still pining after that domineering, presuming man, who had thrown her off after she had condescended to accept him?

"I glory in saying it is for his sake," replied Theodora.

Mrs. Nesbit wearied herself with invectives against the Fotheringhams as the bane of the family, and assured Theodora that it was time to lay aside folly; her rank and beauty would not avail, and she would never be married.

"I do not mean to marry," said Theodora.

"Then remember this. You may think it very well to be Miss Martindale, with everything you can desire; but how shall you like it when your father dies, and you have to turn out and live on your own paltry five thousand pounds? for not a farthing of mine shall come to you unless I see you married as I desire."

"I can do without it, thank you," said Theodora.

Mrs. Nesbit burst into a passion of tears at the ingratitude of her nephews and nieces. Weeping was so unusual with her, that Lady Martindale was much terrified, sent Theodora away, and did her utmost to soothe and caress her; but her strength and spirits were broken, and that night she had another stroke. She was not in actual danger, but was a long time in recovering even sufficiently to be moved to England; and during this period Theodora had little occupation, except companionship to her father and the attempt to reduce her temper and tame her self-will. Mr. Hugh Martindale went to take possession of the living of Brogden, and she remained a prisoner at Baden, striving to view the weariness and enforced uselessness of her life, as he had taught her, in the light of salutary chastisement and discipline.

PART III.

Heartsease in thy heart shall spring
If content abiding,
Where, beneath that leafless tree,
Life's still stream is gliding.
But, transplanted thence, it fades,
For it bloometh only
'Neath the shadow of the Cross,
In a valley lonely. J. E. L.

CHAPTER I.

Love, hope, and patience, these must be thy graces,
And in thine own heart let them first keep school.
COLERIDGE.

THE avenue of Martindale budded with tender green, and in it walked Theodora, watching for the arrival of the sister-in-law, scarcely seen for nearly four years.

Theodora's dress was of the same rigid simplicity as of old, her figure as upright, her countenance as noble, but a change had passed over her; her bearing was less haughty; her step, still vigorous and firm, had lost its wilfulness; the proud expression of lip had altered to one of thought and sadness, and her eyes had become softer and more melancholy. She leaned against the tree where the curate had brought her the first tidings of Arthur's marriage, and she sighed, but not as erst with jealousy and repining.

There was, indeed, an alteration — its beginning may not be traced, for the seed had been sown almost at her birth, and though little fostered, had never ceased to spring. The first visible shoot had been drawn forth by Helen Fotheringham; but the growth, though rapid, had been one-sided; the branches, like those of a tree in a sea-wind, all one way, blown aside by gusts of passion and self-will. In its next

stage, the attempt to lop and force them back had rendered them more crooked and knotty, till the enterprise had been abandoned as vain. But there was a soft hand that had caressed the rugged boughs, softened them with the dews of gratitude and affection, fanned them with gales from heaven, and gently turned them to seek training and culture, till the most gnarled and hardened had learnt patiently to endure the straightening hand and pruning knife.

Under such tranquil uneventful discipline, Theodora had spent the last four years, working with all her might at her labours in the parish, under Mr. Hugh Martindale; and what was a far more real effort, patiently submitting when family duties thwarted her best intentions. Parish work was her solace, in a somewhat weary life, isolated from intimate companionship. She had, indeed, Mr. Hugh Martindale for a guide and adviser, and to her father she was a valuable assistant and companion; but her mother was more than ever engrossed by the care of Mrs. Nesbit; her eldest brother was still in the West Indies; and Arthur only seen in fleeting visits, so short that it had never been convenient for his family to accompany him, nor had Theodora even been spared to attend Violet, when a little girl, now nearly two years old, had been added to her nursery

Letters ill supplied the lack of personal intercourse: Theodora did not write with ease, and Violet could not pour herself out without reciprocity; so that though there was a correspondence, it languished, and their intimacy seemed to be standing still. Another great and heavy care to Theodora was a mistrust of Arthur's proceedings. She heard of him on the turf, she knew that he kept racers; neither his looks nor talk were satisfactory; there were various tokens of extravagance; and Lord Martindale never went to London without bringing back some uncomfortable report.

Very anxious and sad at heart, she hoped to be better satisfied by judging for herself; and after long wearying for a meeting, her wishes were at length in the way of fulfilment — Arthur's long leave was to be spent at home.

The carriage turned in at the lodge gates. She looked up — how differently from the would-be careless air with which she had once watched! But there was disappointment — she saw no brother! In a moment Violet had descended from the carriage, and warmly returned her embrace; and she was kissing the little shy faces that looked up to her, as all got out to walk up the avenue.

"But where is Arthur?"

"He is soon coming," said the soft sweet voice. "He would not let us wait for him."

"What! Has he not got his leave?"

"Yes; but he is going to stay with some of his friends. Mr. Herries came yesterday and insisted."

Theodora thought there was a mournful intonation, and looked anxiously at her face. The form and expression were lovely as ever; but the bright colouring had entirely faded, the cheeks were thin, and the pensive gentleness almost mournful. A careworn look was round the eyes and mouth, even while she smiled, as Theodora gave a second and more particular greeting to the children.

Johnnie was so little changed that she exclaimed at finding the same baby face. His little delicate features and pure fair skin were as white as ever; for not a spring had gone by without his falling under the grasp of his old enemy the croup; and his small slight frame was the more slender from his recent encounter with it. But he was now a very pretty boy, his curls of silken flax fringing his face under his broad-leafed black hat, and contrasting with his soft dark eyes, their gentle and intelligent expression showing, indeed, what a friend and companion he was to his mother; and it was with a shy smile, exactly like hers, that he received his aunt's notice.

"And Helen, my god-child, I have not looked at her! Where are you?"

But the tread of country turf seemed to have put wildness into little Helen. She had darted off, and hidden behind a tree, peeping out with saucy laughter flashing in her

glorious black eyes, and dimpling in the plump roseate cheeks round which floated thick glossy curls of rich dark chestnut. Theodora flew to catch her; but she scampered round another tree, shouting with fun, till she was seized and pressed fast in her aunt's arms, and called a mischievous puss, while Theodora exulted in the splendour of her childish beauty, exuberant with health and spirits. The moment she was released, with another outcry of glee she dashed off to renew the frolic, with the ecstasy of a young fawn, while the round fat-faced Anna tumbled after her like a little ball, and their aunt entered into the spirit of the romp, and pursued them with blitheness for the moment like their own. Johnnie, recovering his mamma's hand, walked soberly beside her, and when invited to join in the sport, looked as if he implored to be excused. Violet, rather anxiously, called them to order as they came near the house, consigned Annie to Sarah, and herself took Helen's hand, observing, gravely, that they must be very good.

"One thing," she half-whispered; "I once had a hint from Miss Piper that Mrs. Nesbit did not like Lady Martindale to be called grandmamma. What do you think?"

"What nonsense! Mamma ought to be proud of her grandchildren, and my aunt will probably never see them or hear them at all. She never comes out of the room."

"Indeed! Is she so much more infirm?"

"Yes, very much aged. Her mind has never been quite itself since the last stroke, though I can hardly tell the difference, but I think it has softened her."

"I suppose Lady Martindale is very much with her?"

"Almost always. She seems to cling to our presence, and I am never quite secure that Mrs. Garth does not domineer over her in our absence, but with all my watching I cannot discover. My aunt says nothing against her, but I sometimes fancy she is afraid of her."

"Poor Mrs. Nesbit. She must be altered indeed!"

"She is altered, but I never am clear how far it is any real change, or only weakness. One comfort is, that she

seems rather to like cousin Hugh's coming to read to her twice a-week. How he will delight in these creatures of yours."

"Ah! we know him," said Violet. "You know he comes to us if he is in London. How pleasant it must be for you."

"Ah, very unlike the days when poor Mr. Wingfield used to come to ask me how to manage the parish," said Theodora, between a laugh and a sigh. "When did you hear from John?"

"His godson had a letter from him on his birthday."

"O, Johnnie! that was an honour! Could you write and answer him?"

"Mamma helped me," whispered the boy, while eyes and mouth lengthened into a bright blushing smile.

"Steady, Helen, my child! Quiet!" exclaimed Violet, as the little girl's delight grew beyond bounds at the sight of the peacock sunning himself on the sphynx's head, and Johnnie was charmed with the flowers in the parterre; and with "look but not touch" cautions, the two were trusted to walk together hand in hand through the gravelled paths.

"The spirits will break out in little skips!" said Theodora, watching Helen. "She preserves her right to be called a splendid specimen! What a pair they are!"

"Poor Helen! I shall be in dread of an outbreak all the time we are here," said Violet; "but she means to be good, and every one cannot be like Johnnie."

"Ah! Johnnie one speaks of with respect."

"I don't know what I should do but for him," said Violet, with her sad smile; "he is so entirely my companion, and I suppose he seems more forward in mind from being so much in the drawing-room."

"Well! he is come to a time of life to merit his papa's notice."

"More than the rest," said Violet; "but unluckily he is a little bit of a coward, and is afraid when papa plays with him. We make resolutions, but I really believe it is a matter of nerves, and that poor Johnnie cannot help it."

"What! Arthur is rough and teasing?"

"He does not understand this sort of timidity; he is afraid of Johnnie's not being manly; but I believe that will come if his health would but be stronger. It is very unlucky," said Violet, "for it vexes papa, and I think it hurts Johnnie, though I am always forced to blame him for being so silly. One comfort is, that it does not in the least interfere with Johnnie's affection — he admires him almost as he used when he was a baby."

They were at the foot of the steps, where Charles Layton, now a brisk page, was helping to unpack the carriage, more intelligently than many a youth with the full aid of his senses.

Lord Martindale met them with his grave kind welcome, which awed even Helen into quiet and decorum, though perhaps, from the corners of her eyes, she was spying the Scagliola columns as places for hide and seek. She opened them to their roundest extent as her grandmamma came down stairs, and she tried to take shelter behind her brother from the ceremonious kiss, while Johnnie tightly squeezed his aunt's hand, and Lady Martindale was quite as much afraid of them as they could be of her.

So began the visit — a very different one from any Violet had hitherto paid at Martindale. Theodora's room was now her chief resort in the morning, and there Johnnie went through his lessons with almost too precocious ease and delight, and Helen was daily conquered over Mrs. Barbauld. There they were sure to be welcome, though they were seldom seen downstairs. Johnnie used to appear in the space before dinner, very demure and well-behaved, and there seemed to be a fellow-feeling arising between him and his grandfather, who would take possession of him if he met him out of doors, and conduct him to any sight suited to his capacity; but who was so much distressed at his forwardness in intellect and his backwardness in strength, that Violet hardly dared to hold a conversation about him for fear of a remonstrance on letting him touch a book.

One day Mrs. Nesbit suddenly said to Theodora, "Arthur's wife and children are here, are not they?"

"Yes; Violet would have come to see you, but we doubted if you were equal to it."

"I have nothing to say to Mr. Moss's daughter; but bring that eldest boy here, I want to see him."

Theodora stepped out into the gallery, where Johnnie was often to be found curled up in the end window, poring over and singing to himself the *White Doe of Rylstone*, which he had found among his uncle's books.

She led him in, exhorting him not to be shy, and to speak out boldly in answer to aunt Nesbit; but perhaps this only frightened him more. Very quiet and silent, he stood under his aunt's wing, with eyes cast down, answering with a trembling effort the questions asked in that sharp searching tone.

"His mother all over!" she said, motioning him away; but, the next day, she sent for him again. Poor Johnnie did not like it all; he could hardly help shuddering at her touch, and at night begged his mamma not to send him to aunt Nesbit, for he could not bear it without her. She had to represent that aunt Nesbit was old and ill, and that it would be unkind not to go to her: but then came the difficult question, "Why don't you go, Mamma?" However, when his compassionate feelings were aroused, he bore it better; and though he never got beyond standing silently by her chair for ten minutes, replying when spoken to, and once or twice reading a few sentences, or repeating some verses, when Theodora thought it would please her, it was evident that his visit had become the chief event of her day. One day she gave him a sovereign, and asked what he would do with it. He blushed and hesitated, and she suggested, "Keep it, that will be the wisest."

"No," came with an effort, and an imploring glance at aunt Theodora.

"Well, then, what? Speak out like a man!"

Still reluctant, but it was brought out at last; "Cousin

Hugh told us about the poor sick Irish children that have no potatoes. May I give it to him to send them?"

"Never mind the Irish children. This is for yourself."

"Myself?" Johnnie looked up, bewildered, but with a sudden thought, "Oh! I know, aunt Theodora, won't it buy that pretty work-basket to give mamma on her birthday? She said she could not afford it. And Helen wanted the great donkey in the shop-window. Oh! I can get Helen the great donkey; thank you, aunt Nesbit!"

The next day aunt Nesbit received Johnnie by giving him five sovereigns to take to cousin Hugh for the Irish, desiring him to say it was his own gift; and while Johnnie scrupulously explained that he should say that she gave it to him to give, she began to instruct him that he would be a rich man by-and-bye, and must make a handsome and yet careful use of his money. "Shall I?" said Johnnie, looking up, puzzled, at his younger aunt.

"Yes, that you will," replied Mrs. Nesbit. "What shall you do then?"

"Oh! then I shall buy mamma and my sisters everything they want, and mamma shall go out in the carriage every day."

"She can do that now," said Theodora, who had expected less commonplace visions from her nephew.

"No," said Johnnie, "we have not got the carriage now. I mean, we have no horses that will draw it."

It was another of those revelations that made Theodora uneasy; one of those indications that Arthur allowed his wife to pinch herself, while he pursued a course of self-indulgence. She never went out in the evening, it appeared, and he was hardly ever at home; her dress, though graceful and suitable, had lost that air of research and choiceness that it had when everything was his gift, or worn to please his eye; and as day after day passed on without bringing him, Theodora perceived that the delay was no such extraordinary event as to alarm her; she was evidently grieved, but it was nothing new. It was too plain that Arthur gave

her little of his company, and his children none of his attention, and that her calmness was the serenity of patience, not of happiness.

This was all by chance betrayed; she spoke not of herself, and the nightly talks between the two sisters were chiefly of the children. Not till more than a week had passed to renew their intimacy, did Theodora advert to any subject connected with the events of her memorable stay in London, and then she began by asking, "What did I overhear you telling papa about Lord St. Erme?"

"I was speaking of his doings at Wrangerton."

"Tell me."

"Oh! they are admirable. You know he went there with that good little Lady Lucy, and they set to work at once, doing everything for the parish —"

"Do your sisters know Lady Lucy?"

"Very little; it is only formal visiting now and then. She leads a very retired life, and they know her best from meeting her at the schools and cottages."

"Good little girl! I knew there was something in her!"

"She is always with her brother, walking and riding and writing for him, carrying out all his views."

"I saw how he came forward about those poor colliery children. Such a speech, as that, was turning his talents to good account, and I am glad to hear it is not all speechifying."

"No, indeed, it is real self-denial. The first thing he did was to take his affairs into his own hands, so that my father has comparatively nothing to do with them. He found them in a bad state, which papa could not help, with him living abroad, and attending to nothing, only sending for money, whatever papa could say. So there was a great outlay wanted for church and schools for the collieries at Coalworth, and nothing to meet it, and that was the way he came to sell off all the statues and pictures."

"Did he? Well done, Lord St. Erme!" cried Theodora. "That was something like a sacrifice."

"O yes! My sisters say they could have cried to see the cases go by the windows, and I cannot help grieving to think of those rooms being dismantled. I am glad they have kept the little Ghirlandajo, that is the only one remaining."

"I honour them," said Theodora.

"And it was for the sake of such a set," proceeded Violet; "there is a bad Chartist spirit among those colliers, and they oppose him in every way; but he says it is his own fault for having neglected them so long, and goes on doing everything for them, though they are as surly and sullen as possible."

Theodora looked thoughtful. "Poor Lord St. Erme! Yes, he has found a crusade! I wish —! Well! I ought to be thankful that good has been brought out of evil. I deserved no such thing. Violet, I wish he would marry one of your sisters!"

"O no, don't wish that. I am glad there is no chance of it. Ranks had better not be confounded," said Violet, with a sad seriousness of manner.

"You have just had a wedding in the family. A satisfactory one, I hope?"

"Yes, I think so. Mamma and Annette like Mr. Hunt very much. They say there is such a straight-forward goodness about him, that they are sure dear Olivia will be happy."

"Was there any difficulty about it?"

"Why — Matilda and Albert seemed to think we should not think it grand enough," said Violet, half smiling. "He is a sort of great farmer on his own estate, a most beautiful place. He is quite a gentleman in manners and very well off, so that my father made no difficulty, and I am very glad of it. Olivia is the very person to enjoy that free country life." Violet sighed as if town life was oppressive.

"To be sure! If one could be a farmer's daughter without the pretension and vulgarity, what a life it would be! That was my favourite notion when I used to make schemes

with poor Georgina Gardner. Do you ever hear what she is doing, Violet? They have quite left off writing to me."

"Last time I heard of them they were in Italy."

"Going on in the old way, I fear. Poor Georgina! she was sadly thrown away. But at least that Mark is not with them."

"O no," said Violet, sighing more deeply this time; "he is always about in London."

"Ah! you see more of him than you wish, I fear?"

"I see very little of him. Arthur would not ask him to our house at Chichester for the Goodwood races, and it was such an escape!"

"I am glad at least Arthur does not trouble you with him."

Violet sat with her forehead resting on her hand, and there was a short space of thoughtful silence. It resulted in Theodora's saying, in a sad, low, humble tone, her eyes looking straight into the red fire, "Do you ever hear of Mr. Fotheringham?"

"I believe he is still at Paris," said Violet. "I only hear of him through John, who said he had been thinking of of going to Italy. When he came through London, after Lady Fotheringham's death, he left his card, but we were at Chichester. Have you seen that last article of his?"

"What, that on modern novels? I was almost sure it was his, and yet I doubted. It was like and yet not like him."

"It was his," said Violet. "He always has his things sent to me. I am glad you observed the difference. I thought it so much kinder and less satirical than his writings used to be."

"It was so," exclaimed Theodora. "There were places where I said to myself, "this cannot be his; I know what he would have said," and yet it was too forcible and sensible to have been written by any one else."

"The strength is there, but not the sort of triumph in sarcasm that sometimes made one sorry," said Violet; "and

were you not struck by his choice of extracts? I have fancied a different strain in his writings of late."

Theodora squeezed Violet's hand. "I feared I had hardened him," she said. "Thank you, good night."

CHAPTER II.

St. Osyth's well is turned aside.
CRABBE.

On the first convenient day, Lord Martindale sent Violet to call at Rickworth Priory, a visit which she was the more desirous of making, as Emma's correspondence, after languishing for awhile, had ceased, excepting that she sent a fresh allegory of Miss Marstone's to Johnnie on each birthday; and the Brandons having given up coming to London for the season, she scarcely knew anything about them, excepting through Theodora, who reported that they retired more and more from society, and that Miss Marstone was much with them.

Theodora would have accompanied Violet, but she was sure that her absence would be a boon to Emma, whom she had of late tried in vain to draw out; and, besides, one of the housemaids was ill, and Theodora, whom her cousin Hugh called the mother of the maids, wished not to be away at the doctor's visit. So little Johnnie was his mother's only companion; but she was disappointed in her hopes of introducing him to his godmother. To her surprise Lady Elizabeth was alone, Emma was at Gothlands with her friend, Miss Marstone.

"They were very kind in asking me," said Lady Elizabeth, "and so was Emma about leaving me; but I do not wish to be a drag upon her."

"Oh! how can you say so?" exclaimed Violet.

"It did not suit," said Lady Elizabeth. "The uncle, old Mr. Randal, is an old-fashioned, sporting squire, and the other Miss Marstones are gay ladies. I felt myself out of my element when I was there before; but now I almost wish I was with her."

"You must miss her very much, indeed."

"It is what we must all come to, my dear," said Lady Elizabeth, looking at the young mother with her boy, leaning against her knee, deep in a book of illustrations. "You have a good many years to look forward to, with your little flock; but, one way or other, they will go forth from us."

Lady Elizabeth thought Johnnie too much absorbed to hear; but Violet found his hand tightly squeezing hers.

"I thought you at least had kept your daughter," she said.

"Emma will be five-and-twenty in the autumn."

"But, oh! Lady Elizabeth, I thought —"

"I cannot tell, my dear. I hope Emma's arrangements may be such that we may go on together as before."

"How do you mean?" exclaimed Violet, confounded.

"Her judgment is sound," continued Lady Elizabeth, "if she will only use it; and when it comes to the point, Miss Marstone's may be the same."

"Is she gone to Gothlands to settle her plans?"

"Yes; I could not well have gone with her; for we have four little orphan girls in the house, whom I could not well leave to the servants. That is quite as I wish, if the rest could be added without Theresa Marstone making this her home, and introducing all the plans they talk of."

"She could not introduce anything to make you uncomfortable!"

"It is not so much comfort that I mean, my dear. I do not think I should object to giving up some of the servants, though in my time it was thought right to keep up an establishment. Perhaps a family of women are not called upon to do things in the same style, and there is no doubt that our means may be better employed. We have too many luxuries, and I would not wish to keep them. No, if it was entirely Emma's doing, I should be satisfied; but there is more influence from Miss Marstone than I quite like. I cannot fully rely on her judgment, and I think she likes to manage."

"She could never presume to manage in your house!"

"Emma's house, my dear."

"But that is the same."

Lady Elizabeth sighed, and made a movement with her head; then said, "All that they think right and conscientious they will do, I am sure; but the worst of it is that Theresa has friends who are not of our Communion, and she does speak strongly of things that do not accord with her notions. I cannot go along with her, and I must confess she sometimes alarms me."

"And does Emma think with her entirely?"

"I fear — I mean I think she does; and, by-the-bye, my dear, do you know anything of a Mr. Gardner?"

"I do know a Mr. Mark Gardner."

"That is his name. He is staying in the neighbourhood of Gothlands, and seems very deep in their counsels. I am afraid he is leading them farther than Theresa Marstone herself would have gone."

"Oh, then, he cannot be the same person. I meant a very different style of man, a cousin to those Miss Gardners who used to be friends of Theodora."

"Ah! I meant to ask you about Miss Gardner and Percival Fotheringham. What! you have not heard?"

"No, nothing. What do you mean?"

"Married."

"Married! No, never!"

"I thought you would have known all about it, and I was anxious to hear what kind of connexion it was for Percival."

"Do tell me, how did you hear of it? When was it?"

"Not long ago, in Italy. I heard of it the other day from my nephew, Edward Howard, who is just returned; and he told me that Mrs. Finch was leading a dashing life at Florence, and that her sister had just married Mr. Fotheringham, 'the author.'"

"O, I do not know how to think it possible! Yet it is such an uncommon name."

"Do you know whether his name is Antony?"

"Yes, it is his first name. I remember Arthur's laughing at him for being ashamed of it, as he said."

"That confirms it. I asked Edward if the Christian name was Percival, and he said it was Antony, and some such name, but he could not be sure."

"Ah! there would be a confusion owing to his being always called Percy."

"He said, too, that it was a good match for Miss Gardner, as he was heir to an estate in Yorkshire."

"Worthbourne! Then I am afraid it must be too true. The author, too!"

"So Edward was told."

"I must write and ask John Martindale. He will be sure to know the whole history."

The rest of the visit and the homeward drive were like a dream. Violet was lost in amazement, compassion, and disappointment, and in the debate how Theodora should be informed. Should she wait till there were further particulars to confirm it? But when she thought it over, there seemed no more wanting. She knew that Percy had been thinking of visiting Italy a year ago, and the name, the authorship, and connexion with Worthbourne swept away all doubt. As to making inquiries, she did not know Arthur's present address; and even if she had had it, she would have shrunk from saying anything that should lead to one additional conversation with Mark Gardner; besides which, Arthur had a fashion of never answering any question asked by letter.

Nor could Violet venture to delay. It was better that such tidings should come from sympathizing lips than through the gossip of the neighbourhood; and Theodora ought to be aware of them as soon as possible, that she might no longer cherish the shade of her affection. Alas! that he should have done this at the very moment when she had truly become worthy of him, or, at least, of what he had once been!

At night, when Theodora came to linger over her fire,

the intelligence was reluctantly and hesitatingly spoken; Violet's eyes were bent down, for she knew how little that spirit could brook that its suffering should be marked.

Theodora stood up before her, at her full height, with flashing eye and indignant voice; "Do you think I believe it? No, indeed! I may have lost him for ever, but he would never lose himself. I scorn this as I did Jane Gardner's own story that you were going to marry him to your sister. I knew you both too well."

Violet put her arm round Theodora. "Dearest, I am the more afraid that we must believe this, because he was not always constant. He did think of Annette."

"Think of her! What do you mean? Did he make her an offer?"

"Yes. I would never have told you if I did not think it might help you in this."

"I don't want help," said Theodora, raising her head and turning from Violet. "Let him do as he likes."

But, ere she had made two steps towards the door, her breast heaved with a convulsive sob. She threw herself on the ground, and rested her face on Violet's lap. The sobs came at long intervals, with a tight, oppressed sound. Much alarmed, Violet caressed her, and tried to soothe her with gentle words, and at last they unlocked her lips.

"It is not myself! Oh, no! I knew I had forfeited him long ago. I had proved myself unworthy. I had no right to hope. But that he should have changed — let his clear sense be blinded by her art! He, to whom I could have looked up all my life! — who was so noble in rejecting me!"

The large drops had gathered and flowed, seeming to scald their course down her cheeks. O, Violet! I wish your sister had married him! Then he would have been happy — he would not have degraded himself. Oh! what change can have come over him?"

"You know Lady Fotheringham was fond of Jane Gardner, and he might have taken her upon her word."

"As if Percy would see with any old woman's eyes, when

once he came in contact with her! No, I see but one explanation. It must have been I who lowered his estimate of woman. Well I might do so, when I treated like a toy the happiness he had confided to me. I, on whom he had fixed his ardent soul for so many years past. No wonder he learnt to hold all women cheap alike! O, that summer of madness! If I have dimmed the brightness of that noble nature!"

"Dear, dear Theodora, what can I say to comfort you? She may be altered; he may have improved her."

"She is not capable of it," said Theodora; "there is nothing in her but time-serving and selfishness. And he, with that large true heart, so detesting falsehood — he must either be wretched or deceived — debased! No, there is no comfort — there never will be."

"Except the best sort," tenderly whispered Violet.

Theodora rested her head on her hands, and remained perfectly still for some moments, then looked up, and spoke in a depressed voice.

"I cannot talk any more. I feel shattered from head to foot. I must be quiet."

"Then, dearest, pray go to bed at once, and I will come and see you."

"I cannot. I undertook to give Maria her draught at one o'clock. May I stay here while you go to bed?"

"Anything, dearest, dearest sister."

"Only let me be in the room with you, and be quiet."

She would not, as Violet intreated, lie down on the bed beside her, but remained seated on the floor, her eyes riveted on the fire, never looking round; her face stupified, her hands hanging motionless, like one stunned; and when Violet's anxious gaze was closed by irresistible sleep, that dark head was still motionless before the fire.

Her mind was indeed a blank, sensible of nothing but the effect of the shock. The phrase now and then occurred, "Percy is married to Jane;" but her perceptions were so sluggish that she scarcely knew that it concerned her. She seemed to have forgotten who Percy was, and to shrink from

recalling the remembrance. There was a repose in this state of stupor which she was reluctant to break; and after the great clock, so melancholy in the silence, had tolled half-past twelve, her sensations were absorbed in the dread of hearing *One!* the summons to exertion.

The single note pealed out, and died quivering slowly away; she rose, lighted her candle, and quitted the room, feeling as if the maid's illness and the doctor's directions belonged to some period removed by ages.

CHAPTER III.

> This house of splendour and of princely glory
> Doth now stand desolated, the affrighted servants
> Rush forth through all its doors. I am the last
> Therein. *Wallenstein.*

THEODORA was no sooner in the gallery than she was recalled to the present. There was a strange gleam of light reflected on the avenue. Roused at once to action, she hurried towards the window. The fire was within the house. She pushed open the door leading to Mrs. Nesbit's apartments. Light was flashing at every chink of the bed-room door. She threw it back. Out rolled a volume of smoke, the glare of flame burst on her, the curtains were blazing! "Aunt! Aunt Nesbit, are you there?" she cried, in tones low with horror and choked with smoke; she plunged between the burning curtains, felt that she had a hold of something, dragged it out, found it move and gasp, bore it from the room, and, depositing it on a couch in the gallery, only then could perceive that it was indeed Mrs. Nesbit, uninjured, though half-suffocated.

Mrs. Garth, who slept in the adjoining room, with the door open, had been waked by her call, and came running out. An old soldier, she had full self-possession, and was at once effective; and it was well, for she exclaimed, "Miss Martindale, you are on fire," just as the light and the scorching were revealing the same to herself. There was no time for personal terror, barely for pain; the fire was crushed out

between them by the help of a woollen table cover, they scarcely knew how, they only saw that the draught had increased the blaze in the room, and dense clouds of smoke came bursting out upon them.

Mrs. Nesbit clung terrified to her niece, but Theodora, with a word or two of encouragement, freed herself from her grasp, and leaving her to Mrs. Garth's care, flew up the nursery stairs. She must have the children in their mother's sight, before the alarm should reach her. Sarah's first waking impulse was to growl, that Master Johnnie would catch his death of cold, but the next moment she was equal to any emergency; and the little ones were at their mother's door just as she was opening it, thinking the noise more than Maria's illness could occasion, and setting forth to see whether there was anything amiss in the nursery. Theodora put Annie into her arms. "All safe. It is only the north wing. Don't be frightened. Stay where you are."

Violet could only obey, thankful at having her three around her, and trying to keep her terror from being visible enough to increase Johnnie's exceeding alarm, or to frighten Helen out of her happy state of inquisitive excitement and curiosity.

Theodora had hurried to call her parents. They were already in motion. Lord Martindale's first care was for Violet and the children, Lady Martindale's for her aunt, and almost instantly she was embracing and supporting the pale shrunken figure, now feebly tottering along the gallery, forsaken by Mrs. Garth, who had gone back to secure her own valuables.

By this time, the gallery was full of screaming maids, whom Sarah had, with difficulty, prevented from leaping at once from attic windows; and staring men, hallooing for water, which no one brought, except little Helen, who, escaping from her mother's room, ran barefooted into the midst, holding aloft the water-bottle triumphantly, and very indignant at being captured, and carried back in the butler's arms.

The fire was spreading so fast that Lord Martindale decided on removing all the helpless to the gardener's house at the end of the pleasure ground. He came himself to call Violet, told her not to be alarmed, and, taking his grandson in his arms, led the way. Mrs. Nesbit was carried on a matress between two of the servants, Lady Martindale walking beside her, absorbed in trying to guard her from injury or alarm; Annie, asleep and unconscious, was in her mother's arms, and Theodora carried the amused and chattering Helen. At the foot of the stairs, Violet exclaimed, "My cross, I must not leave it!" and would have turned, but Theodora prevented her. "I know where it is," she said, "I am going to see how they are moving Maria;" and putting Helen into the nearest pair of arms, she ran back.

Harrison's successor, Mr. Armstrong and his wife, were on foot, and ready to receive them. Their spare bed was for Mrs. Nesbit, in their own the three children were placed. In all his haste, Lord Martindale paused till he could lay his little shivering ice-cold charge in the bed, and see him hide his head in his mother's bosom. "Good boy!" he said, "I told him not to cry for you, and he has not made a sound, though I have felt him trembling the whole way. Take care of him."

Little did she need the recommendation, though it sent a thrill of gladness through her that it should have been made at such a time. She had great apprehension of the effect of the shock on the child's tender frame and timid nature, his obedience and self-command seeming almost to enhance the excess of terror. The shuddering horror and convulsive clinging were beyond control, and were renewed whenever a fresh glare broke out from the burning house; to turn him away from the window, or to put up blinds and curtains made it worse, for the shadows of the trees, flickering mysteriously, seemed still more terrific. His sister screamed with excitement and delight at each brighter burst of flame, till she suddenly laid down her head and fell fast asleep; but still his nervous trembling continued at inter-

vals, and his mother could not leave him, nor cease from saying consoling words of his heavenly Guardian, the only means that soothed him, especially when his sighing exclamation recurred, "O, if papa was but here!" the tune to which her heart was throbbing throughout that dreadful night. She felt guilty of being useless, but he was her first care, and her power of real service was small: so she could only hang over him, and as she watched the healthful sleep of her little girls, join her prayers and thanksgivings with his, that all papa's treasures were safe. Not till the flames were dying down, morning twilight showing cold and grey, and Sarah coming in with bundles of rescued garments, was Johnnie's mind free enough to unclasp his hand, and show something fast held in it. "Aunt Helen's cross, mamma; I thought I might keep hold of it, because I was frightened."

Her caresses lulled him at last to sleep, while she grieved at Theodora's having gone in search of the cross. She knew of her safety from Sarah, who reported that she had been working like any ten; but she had not yet seen her, and the silence and suspense became oppressive.

Theodora had spent hardly a moment in seeking the cross; she tied on Violet's bonnet over the hair falling round her, hurried to assist in carrying the sick maid to a bed made up for her at the stables, and then, missing the dumb page from among the servants, she rushed back to look for him, dashed up the stairs through thick smoke, found him asleep, and crossing a floor that almost burnt her foot, she shook him awake, and saw him too in safety. She bethought her of her brother John's possessions, now that the living were all secure; she hurried into the work, she tore down his prints and pictures, carried them and his books out, — desks, drawers, weights she would never have dreamt of lifting, were as nothing to her. Many times did her father meet her, exclaim and urge her to desist, and to go to Armstrong's; she said she was just going; he went in one of the thousand directions in which he was called at once, and presently again encountered her, where he least

expected it, coming out of a cloud of smoke, with a huge pile of books in her arms! On she worked, regardless of choking, blinding smoke, — regardless of the glare of flame, — never driven from the field, but by a deluge from a fire-engine; when stumbling down stairs, guided by the banisters, she finally dismayed her father, who thought her long ago in safety, by emerging from the house, dragging after her a marble-topped chess table, when half the upper windows were flashing with flame.

Then he locked her arm into his, and would not let her stir from his side.

Water had been the great deficiency. Fire-engines were slow in coming, and the supply from the fountains was as nothing, so that the attempt had necessarily been to carry out property rather than to extinguish the fire. Sarah, after coolly collecting all that belonged to her mistress or the children, had taken the command of Miss Alticidora Standaloft, (who usually regarded her as vulgarity personified,) scolded away her hysterics, and kept guard over her, while she packed up her lady's jewels and wardrobe, not until then allowing her the luxury of shrieking at every jet of flame. The other servants and the villagers had worked with hearty goodwill below stairs; and when Theodora had time to look around, the pleasure-ground presented a strange scene. Among the trodden plants and shrubs lay heaps of furniture, sofas, chairs lying tumbled here and there with plate, pictures, statues, ornaments heaped in wild confusion; crowds of people in every variety of strange dishabille, gathered around; two long lines of them handing bucket after bucket, with machine-like regularity, from the fountain; others removing the furniture from the terrace; cushions, ormolu, fine china, handed out of the lower windows; the whole seen by the wild lurid light that flashed from the windows above, strangely illuminating the quiet green trees, and bringing out every tiny leaf and spray by its fierce brilliancy, that confused every

accustomed shadow, while the clouds of smoke rolled down as if to wither all around.

And above, the rushing roaring sound! the thunder of falling ceilings; — the red light within some familiar windows; — the grey sky reflected in others, till, after a few uncertain flickers, the glow awoke in them also! Then arose the whiter gusts of vapour, when water, hissing and boiling, contended with fire.

In vain! the flame surmounted! Shouts, cries! Lord Martindale pushing nearer, calling to all for heaven's sake to come out, leave all, only come out; men rushing from the doors, leaping from the lower windows; one dark figure emerging at the moment before a tremendous crash shook the earth beneath their feet; the fire seemed for a moment crushed out, then clouds of smoke rose wilder and denser, yellowed by the light of the morning; the blaze rushed upwards uncontrolled, and the intensity of brightness, behind and above the walls, glared on the mass of awe-struck faces. There was not a movement, not a word, not a sound, save that of the roaring flame.

The first voice was Lord Martindale's: "Are all out? Is every one safe?"

"Yes, my lord, all but the claret of 1826," said that last to escape, half-clad, grimy, and singed, only in courteous voice, the butler.

"Thank God!" said Lord Martindale, fervently. "And, Simmonds, thank you for what you have done to-night;" and he heartily shook the butler's hand.

"Oh, my lord, if it had been more. If that claret was but safe, I should feel I had done my duty," said Simmonds, almost overcome, but giving place to Mr. Hugh Martindale, who, just released from a chain of buckets in the kitchen yard, was coming up to wring his cousin's hand, say there seemed no more to be done, and repeat his congratulations on the safety of life and limb. But a fresh alarm arose, lest the fire might extend to the stabling; and in watching the horses led out, the spreading of wet tarpaulins on the roof,

the engines playing on the burning mass in the house, and the flames rising with diminishing fierceness in the intervals of the bursts of steam, there was such intense excitement, that no one could think of aught but the sight before them.

At last, there was a touch on Lord Martindale's arm; a message from the gardener's house that he must come directly; Mrs. Nesbit was in a fit.

The morning dewiness and calmness of the garden had a curious effect, as they walked hastily through it, out of sight of the confusion on the lawn; everything looked so blue and pale, especially Violet, who came down to meet them.

"I have sent for Mr. Legh," she said. "It is very terrible. She is quite insensible, but—"

She broke off suddenly. Theodora had sat down, untied her bonnet, then tried to rise, but tottered, and sank senseless on the floor.

Her father lifted her, so as to place her with her head on Violet's lap. Violet removed the bonnet, the hair came with it, burnt off in masses, the very eye-lashes and brows were singed, the forehead, cheeks, and neck, frightfully reddened and blistered. Lord Martindale took her hands to chafe them. They were bleeding, and purple with bruises, the arms scorched and burnt — injuries overlooked in the excitement, but ready to repay themselves after her five hours' violent and incessant exertion. It was a frightfully long swoon; and her father, almost in despair, had sent a second messenger for medical aid, before Violet could look up consolingly, and direct his attention to the signs of returning animation. She presently half-opened her eyes, perceived in whose arms she lay, and who was bending over her, she heard his fond words; but reviving no further, closed her eyes, without attempting to speak.

Lord Martindale could no longer delay going up stairs. There the scene was most distressing; there was complete insensibility, with a tendency to convulsive movement, a condition so plainly hopeless, that he would fain have re-

moved his wife, hitherto so unaccustomed to any spectacle of suffering. But Lady Martindale was not to be detached from her who had absorbed her affection from infancy. Wrapped in that one idea, she hardly heard his representations of their daughter's state, and, with piteous looks, repelled his assurances that her care was unavailing, and ought to be relinquished to Mrs. Garth and the maids. He was obliged at length to desist, and returned, just as Violet and Mr. Martindale had succeeded in moving Theodora to a slippery horse-hair sofa. She looked up and replied, "Better, thank you," to his first inquiry; but when asked if she was in pain, was forced to answer, "Yes, not much," and closed her eyes, as if she only wished not to be disturbed.

They held council over her: Mr. Martindale urged taking her at once to his parsonage; he would find the carriage, and Violet should bring her, leaving the children to follow under Sarah's charge when they should awake. Violet only demurred at leaving Lady Martindale; but Lord Martindale authoritatively told her, that it was not fit for her to be in Mrs. Nesbit's room, and he should be much obliged to her to see Theodora properly taken care of.

The transit was serious, every one longed to have it over, but dreaded the arrival of the carriage, which came before it was expected. Resolute as ever, Theodora astonished them by springing at once on her feet, disdaining aid; but she had hardly taken a step, before she faltered, and was just falling, when her father caught her in his arms and carried her to the carriage, where Violet was ready to uphold her sinking head. Mr. Martindale took the short way, and was at home before them, to lift her out, and transport her at once to her room. Since the marriage of Pauline, Theodora had given up a personal attendant, and no ladies' maids were forthcoming, except Miss Standaloft, whose nerves could not endure the sight of Mrs. Nesbit, far less of Miss Martindale, so the whole business of undressing fell upon Violet, and the rector's little under maid, who, having been a school-girl, was of course devoted to Miss Martindale

A difficult task it was, for besides the burns, bruises, and faintness, every muscle and sinew were so strained and tender from the violent exertion, and the blows she had unconsciously received, that the gentlest touch and slightest movement were severely painful. Violet was most grateful for her never-failing resolution. Every move was made unhesitatingly the moment it was requisite, and not a complaint was uttered, scarcely even a confession of suffering; on anxious inquiry, "Never mind, it can't be helped," was the utmost reply, given in a blunt, almost annoyed manner, as if she could not bear to be disturbed out of that silence of endurance.

In the same manner, between stupefaction and fortitude, the surgeon's visit was gone through, and Violet heard from him that there was no serious consequence to be apprehended, provided fever could be averted. Violet, much alarmed as to the effect of the tidings of the previous night, thought it right to mention that she had undergone a severe shock, and perceived that he thought it greatly increased the chance of serious illness; but he could do nothing but insist on tranquillity; and, as Theodora had now fallen into an exhausted sleep, he returned to his other patient.

The hours seemed to have forgotten their reckoning; it was to Violet as if she had been years without looking after her children, and when she found it was only half-past nine, she was dismayed to think of the length of day yet to come. Leaving Theodora's sleep to be guarded by the little maid; she ventured down. The dumb boy was watching, with tearful eyes, at the foot of the stairs, his whole face one question about Miss Martindale. Answering him re-assuringly on the slate, she opened the dining-room door, and a refreshing sight met her eyes. Round the breakfast-table sat her own three, from their glossy heads to their little shining shoes, in order trim, as if no disaster had ever come near them; — little Annie on cousin Hugh's knee; Helen's tongue going as fast as ever; Johnnie in shy good behaviour. A general cry of joy greeted her, and they were in an in-

stant around her, telling of the wonders on the lawn; how the dying gladiator was lying on the blue damask bed, and the case of stuffed humming birds on the top of the kitchen dresser, and the poor peacock so frightened that he hid himself in the laurels, and would not come near them.

All alarms had gone away like a dream of the night, and the day had dawned on the happy creatures in all its freshness and newness, which their elders would fain have shared; but the necessity of attending to them had something reviving in it, and Violet could not look at them without renewed thrills of thankfulness. It was like rescued mariners meeting after a shipwreck, when her father-in-law came in and embraced her and the children affectionately, with a special caress for Johnnie, "the best little boy he ever saw." He looked worn and depressed, and Violet hastened to help Mr. Martindale in setting breakfast before him, while he anxiously bade her rest, hoped she had not been hurt by all she had undergone; and asked for Theodora, whose illness, and his wife's despair at her aunt's condition, were the chief actual distress. For the rest he was so thankful that no life had been lost, as to have hardly a thought to bestow on the ruin and destruction.

There was now time for the question, how did the fire begin? Mrs. Nesbit, before her attack came on, had said, that wishing to take a draught, and not liking to call Mrs. Garth, she had drawn the light near to the curtains, and had, doubtless, left it there. It seemed as if Mrs. Garth had taught her to dread disturbing her at night, and now Lady Martindale shrank with horror from letting her even approach the patient.

But how had Mrs. Nesbit been rescued without the slightest burn, and what had occasioned Theodora's injuries? Not till Violet began to explain did it dawn on her what a heroine she was describing. All had been so simply and fearlessly done, that it had not struck her till she heard it in her own narration.

Lord Martindale was much affected. "My brave girl!"

he said; "then under Providence the safety of every one of us is owing to her. I wish she was awake that I might tell her so this minute!"

It was delightful to see how this seemed to compensate for everything; and, indeed, he said it was almost worth while to have been burnt out, for the sake of seeing how nobly every one had behaved, servants and neighbours, rich and poor, working alike at the risk of their lives; and he was positively overcome as he spoke of the warm sympathy that met him on all sides, testifying the universal respect and affection with which he was regarded. Notes and messages were coming in from all the neighbourhood to entreat to be allowed to shelter his family; but it was impossible to move at present, and his views were fixed on occupying the house which had so long stood empty.

"Arthur can have a room fitted up there directly," he said. "Where is he, my dear? How soon can he come?"

Violet was obliged to confess her ignorance. He had said he should be going about, and had given her no address. Much vexed, Lord Martindale forbore to distress her by remarks, and replied to his cousin's question whether the house was insured —

"For twenty thousand pounds, but that is nothing like the amount of damage. I hardly know how we shall meet it. I must have John at home to settle matters. How strange it is to look back. I remember as if it was yesterday, when John was born, Mrs. Nesbit insisting on my pulling down the poor old house, to make the place fit, as she said, for my son's inheritance, and there is an end of it! Who would have told her that she would burn it down herself, poor woman? She always detested the old hall. Don't you remember the stags' antlers, Hugh! Ay, Johnnie, you would have wondered at those — a dozen stags' heads with branching horns in the hall."

"Oh! tell me, grandpapa! Was it where you lived when you were a little boy?"

"Ay, Johnnie," said Lord Martindale, pausing to take

him on his knee. "Cousin Hugh could tell you how we went on together there! Such jackdaws' nests as used to be in the chimneys —"

"I do believe," said his cousin, "you have more regret at this moment for the old house than for this one!"

"Well! when I think of going home, the old red pediment with the white facings always comes into my mind, as it used to look up the avenue, when we came back for the holidays. Those old shields with the martlets — see, Johnnie, like that—" holding up the crest on a spoon, "where the martins used to build their nests over the windows, were such as I never saw anywhere else. I found one of them lying about at the farm the other day."

"Do you remember the hornet's nest in the wall of the garden —?"

"What a garden that was! They have never found any pear equal to that jargonelle, where you ate twenty the first day of the holidays. What do you think of that, Johnnie?"

"Ay, Johnnie, and I can tell you of something grandpapa did," retorted Mr. Hugh Martindale; and to Violet's diversion, the two old cousins continued to make Johnnie an excuse for bringing up their boyish memories, which seemed to rise on them the more vividly, now that the great mansion no longer obstructed their view. It was complete oblivion of everything else, and seemed to do infinite good to Lord Martindale but soon it was interrupted; Lady Elizabeth had driven over to beg to carry the whole party back to Rickworth with her, or at least to take home Violet and the children; but this could not be; Violet could not leave Theodora, and though Lord Martindale pressed her to consult her own comfort by removing, he was evidently gratified by her begging to be allowed to remain at the parsonage. He then returned to his wife, and Lady Elizabeth, after offers of every service in her power, took leave, while Violet returned to her charge.

Theodora awoke with less fever than they had ventured to hope, and quite composed, though much surprised with

her first acquaintance with illness, and not even comprehending that she could not get up, till the pain of the attempt corroborated Violet's assurance.

"How base it is," said she, "not to be able to do a few hours' work without having to take to one's bed. I flattered myself I was not so despicably weak, for a woman."

"You might be satisfied," said Violet, her heart too full to say more.

"Not while your Sarah walks about as if nothing had happened."

"Where should any of us be but for you?" said Violet, bending over her.

"There 's not an inch of me fit for kissing!" exclaimed Theodora, turning away.

"Lord Martindale will soon come to tell you what he thinks of it."

"Papa! Where is he? I don't remember him since we went down to Armstrong's. "Yes, I do though!" she paused, "but I can't think of it. Crying would be worse. What a queer thing fainting is! I used to speculate what it was like."

"How do you like it?" said Violet, perceiving her mood.

"Tolerably, in some respects; but it makes one's memory hazy. What has become of mamma? I suppose she is afraid of the sight of my visage."

"Oh! no, no!"

"My aunt, of course! How could I forget! Mrs. Armstrong spoke of her being ill. Was it another stroke?" said Theodora, alarmed as her recollection returned, and Violet was obliged to tell the whole.

"My poor mother!" said Theodora, gravely, "I wish I could help —"

There was a knock at the door. Miss Standaloft stood hesitating and making signs to Violet.

"Is there any news of Mrs. Nesbit?" asked Theodora. "There can be only one thing to hear. Is it over?"

It was, and the end had been quiet. Theodora drew a long breath, and repeated, "Poor mamma!"

"Do you want me? Do you think I might go to her?" said Violet. "She has no one with her but the gentlemen."

"I should be very glad if you were there. Only don't hurt yourself, or Arthur will be angry; and to have you to nurse would be more than could be borne. My poor aunt! I think she softened at the last, and she loved us all very much at one time."

"I am glad she was kind to Johnnie," said Violet.

Miss Alticidora was induced to sit on the other side the curtain, intending to call Sarah if anything was wanted, and Violet walked across the park, dreading to enter for the first time the presence of the shadow of death, fearing in her lowliness to intrude or presume, but drawn onwards by the warm-hearted yearning to perform a daughter's part, if perchance her husband's mother could derive the least solace from her attentions.

She crossed the trodden grass, and gazed on the ruin of the abode that had once almost oppressed her with its grandeur. Past away! and with it, she whose hopes and schemes were set on the aggrandisement of the family — she had gone where earthly greatness was weighed in its true balance! And the lime trees budded, new and young in their spring greenness, as when the foundation-stone was laid!

Violet thought how she had been taught to look on this as her boy's inheritance, and therewith came the prayer that he might win his true inheritance, made without hands, ever spring-like and beyond the power of the flame! She looked up at the shell, for it was no more, she only recognized the nursery windows by their bars; the woodwork was charred, the cement blackened by the fire, where yesterday Helen's and Annie's faces had been watching her return! A sick horror passed over her as she thought how much had depended on Theodora's watchful night, and imagined what might have awaited Arthur!

Then with hopeful, grateful anticipation, she looked to his coming, and his greeting after such perils endured in

his absence. "O, will not thankfulness bring him those thoughts? It must! He must join with me, when he owns the mercy and sees our children safe. Oh! then blessings on this night's danger! Let me see, he will learn it from the paper! When can he come? Oh! how his looks and one word from him will reward Theodora!"

She felt as if her happy anticipation had been selfish when she came near the cottage with its blinded windows. Lord Martindale was speaking to some one, but turned at once to her. "You here, my dear? You have heard?"

"Yes, I have; but Theodora and I thought as Lady Martindale has no maid here, that I had better come and see if I could do anything for her. Can I?" said she, with her humble sweetness.

"I cannot tell, my dear," he answered. "She attends to nothing, and has not been able to shed tears. We cannot rouse her. Indeed, I am sorry you came; you ought to be resting."

"O, no, we both wished it. Should I be troublesome to her?"

"No, indeed, my dear child," said he, affectionately. "It is a great relief to me that you should be with her, for here is much that I must attend to, and I wish nothing so much as to get her to the parsonage. The carriage is waiting, but she will not hear of coming away, and I do not know how to leave her here."

So saying, he led her into the room; Violet gave one shrinking glance towards the bed, while the chill of awe shot through her veins; but the chief thought was needed for her, who sat rigid and motionless, with fixed tearless eyes, and features in cold stillness more than ever like marble. Violet felt as if that deathly life was more painful to look upon than death itself, and her hand trembled in Lord Martindale's grasp; he pressed it closer, and going up to his wife, said, "Anna, my dear, here is our child Violet so kind as to come and see you."

Lady Martindale made a courteous movement, as if by

mechanism, but without looking up. He was delaying, unable to leave them thus, though he was much wanted below stairs.

"I will stay while you go," whispered Violet, though she longed to keep him, for that presence filled her with trembling, and promising speedy return, he departed.

For some minutes she could venture nothing, and the silence in which she heard only the beatings of her own heart seemed more than she could bear; but at last she collected herself, and an impulse suddenly occurring to her, she ventured to touch her mother-in-law, and said, "Theodora has been asking for you."

Lady Martindale shook her head. "I cannot come, I cannot leave her."

"Poor Theodora is so much hurt!" pleaded Violet; "you will be surprised to see how she is scorched! Such arms and hands, that she cannot help herself — and she wants cold applications continually."

Lady Martindale once looked attentive, but a glance at her aunt brought back her face of silent misery. Violet was perplexed, but strove on — "Poor Theodora! I hope you will come to her. She wants care very much. Did you know that it was in saving *her* that she was so sadly burnt?"

"No: Was it?"

"Yes, she snatched her out through the burning curtains. That was the way Theodora's hair was all burnt off; and her arms are so blistered!" continued Violet, controlling her trembling, and speaking as when she was persuading one of the children — "Poor Theodora! Will you not come and see her?"

"Where is she?"

"She is at the parsonage. They are ready to take us."

"Oh, no! I cannot go. You go to her."

"Pray, pray come with me. Theodora is so ill! It would do her so much good to see you; and we are afraid of her being anxious or distressed, lest she should have fever. Won't you come?"

A motion, as if she could not bear this, made Violet fear she must desist, and she paused for a short interval, then said, "*She* was very fond of Theodora."

"Oh! Yes, yes —"

"She would not like her to be left so long."

"I thought you were taking care of her."

"Oh, yes! but I cannot be the same as you would. One always wants one's mother so much in illness."

"She was always a mother to me!" The tears came at last, and she wept unrestrainedly; while Violet hung over her with soft caressing words of sympathy that cannot be detailed, till the first grief had had its course, and she again tried the experiment of repeating Theodora's name, and saying how much she was suffering.

Lady Martindale did not reply, but suffered Violet to put on her cloak, and gradually lead her from the room, saying at each pause something of "poor Theodora."

The deed was done; it might be by importunity, but it was worth achieving, even at the risk of being vexatious. Lord Martindale could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his wife on her way to the carriage, and Theodora was equally astonished when she appeared at her bed-side.

It was a new thing to see one, hitherto healthy and independent, so completely prostrated; and no more was needed to awaken the natural affection so long stifled or thrust aside. Lady Martindale was greatly shocked, and, perhaps magnifying her daughter's illness, had no room for any other thought. She wished to do everything for her herself — would hardly admit Violet's assistance — and took every care, with skilfulness that was marvellous in one trained to ineffectiveness.

To Theodora her attendance was a new and exquisite repose. It was the first taste of her mother's love, and made her content to be helpless; as there she lay, murmuring thanks, and submitting to be petted with a grateful face of childlike peace, resting in her mother's affection, and made happy by the depth of warm feeling in her father's words.

"It is a good speculation to be ill," said she, with a smile of strong feeling when they had bidden her good night, and left her to Violet, who was to sleep on a matress on the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said a spider to a fly.
MARY HOWITT.

AND where was Arthur?

Spending the day with his sporting friends, much to his own satisfaction, till in the evening, greatly against his will, he was taken out to dine with an old Mr. Randall, of Gothlands, the master of the hounds.

His nieces, the Misses Marstone, were the ladies of the house — well-dressed people, a little *passées*, but apparently not having found it out. Arthur watched the arrivals, hoping that the order of precedence might not consign him to the flow of talk, of which he had already had quite a sufficiency, when, to his surprise, two ladies, evidently at home, entered together.

One — thin, sallow, spectacled — was, as he knew, an inhabitant; but the other — small, slight, and retiring, and, in spite of clinging unfresh muslin and shrinking figure, with the unmistakable air of high breeding, was a most unexpected sight. At least, thought he, here was one lady who would not bore him, and making his way to her, he inquired for Lady Elizabeth. Emma, on the other hand, asked after Violet; and it was curious that both questions were put and answered with constraint, as if each was conscious of being something like a truant.

Another surprise. "Mr. Gardner." In walked Mark himself, and, after shaking hands with the elder Miss Marstone, came towards Emma and her friend, and was received with cordial familiarity. He entered into conversation with Arthur, drawing a little further from Miss Brandon at each step, till having brought him close to old Mr. Randall, and

placed him under the infliction of a long prose about the hounds; he retreated, and was soon again in conversation with the two friends, Emma's face raised and lighted up with eagerness.

Colonel Martindale had no escape from the head of the table and the eldest of the Misses Marstone. Resigning himself to his fate, he made talk; and, though now broader, redder, and somewhat coarser in feature and complexion than he had been a few years ago, he looked so gay and unincumbered, that his neighbour speculated as to whether he could be the eldest son, and resolved to discover what her sister, Sarah Theresa, knew of him.

"It is so pleasant when friends meet unexpectedly," said she. "I did not know you were acquainted with either of our guests."

"Miss Brandon is a near neighbour of my father, and a great friend of Mrs. Martindale."

Death to any incipient scheme of Miss Marstone; but she smiled on, and remarked, "A very amiable girl, and a beautiful place, is it not — Rickworth?"

"Very pretty, a fine property," said Arthur, talking as if in his sleep, for he had caught Mark Gardner's voice saying something about an oratory.

"My sister is often staying there," proceeded the lady. "You know Miss Brandon's scheme of restoring the Priory?"

"I did not know that was anything more than talk."

"I used to think so," said Miss Marstone; "but both she and my sister Sarah treat it quite seriously, and Mr. Gardner is their prime counsellor."

Arthur started, and with difficulty refrained from laughing.

"Ah! I believe he has been a little wild, but that is all over now. He has taken quite a different turn now, and given up everything of that sort — throws himself into all their views."

"Indeed!" said Arthur, who knew to his cost that if the

reform had taken place at all, it must have been of extremely recent date.

"O, yes, I assure you. He is staying with the curate, Mr. Silworth."

"Ha! that is an old name at school."

"Yes; he was an old school-fellow — a very good man, to whose persuasions everything is owing."

She pointed him out, and the first glance was a revelation to Arthur, who recognized him as the boy who at school had been the most easily taken in. He soon understood the state of affairs. Mark, clever, gentlemanly in appearance, and apt at catching the tone of the society around him, was making a bold stroke — had persuaded his kind-hearted, simple friend, to believe him a sincere penitent, and to introduce him as such to the ladies at Gothlands, from whom he caught the talk most pleasing to them. At present it was all ecclesiastical æsthetics, and discontent with the existing system, especially as regarded penitence; by and by, when his hold should be secure, he would persuade the heiress that she had been the prime instrument in his conversion, and that she had gained his heart.

A bit of rhapsody from Miss Sarah Theresa, and poor Emma's embellished and animated countenance, were sufficient indications that they were smoothly gliding into the snare; and accustomed as Arthur was to see Mark Gardner in a very different aspect, he was astonished at his perfect performance of his part — the humility and deference befitting the sense of his errors, and conversation so entirely at home in all their peculiar language and predilections, that Arthur was obliged to feel for the betting-book in his own pocket to convince himself that he was still deeply involved with this most admirable and devoted of penitents. He could not help, as he took leave, giving a knowing look, conveying how easily he could spoil his game.

However, Arthur was in reality much annoyed. Of late years, his easy temper had well nigh surrendered itself to the ascendency of Mark Gardner; and though dissatisfied,

remorseful, and anxious, he had allowed himself to be led farther and farther into extravagance. The sight of his home excited regrets, therefore he shunned it; and though weary and discontented in his chains, he was devoid of force or will to break them, and sort of torpor seemed to make it impossible for him to resist Mark Gardner. Their money matters were much entangled. They had entered into a partnership for keeping horses for the turf, and there was a debt shared between them, the amount of which Arthur dreaded to investigate.

That Gardner should obtain a rich wife would be the greatest relief to Colonel Martindale; but he had rather it should have been any heiress in the world but Emma Brandon. He had a friendly feeling towards her, and a respect for her mother, that made him shrink from allowing her to become a victim, especially when he would himself be the gainer; and, on the other hand, he could not endure to betray a friend, while he knew that his wife, his father, and his sister would be horrified at his secrecy.

After a night spent in execrating the dinner party, he received a call from Mr. Gardner, who, without being aware that he took any interest in Miss Brandon, came to put him upon his guard, but found him less manageable than usual. Arthur made a formidable description of Lady Elizabeth's discretion, underrated the value of Rickworth, and declared that it would be so tied up that Mark would gain nothing but a dull, plain little wife. Not thus deterred, Mark only asked of him discretion; and when trying to cloak his earnest under faltering jest, he declared that he had a regard for the Brandons, and should get into a scrape with from his father, his friend held out the allurement of freedom his difficulties, but was obliged to touch on this lightly, for Arthur's honour was ready to take fire at the notion of being bought. It ended in Gardner's treating the matter as if he had engaged not to betray him, and being hardly gainsaid, otherwise than by a sort of bantering proviso, that in case

of an appeal direct, he could not be expected to vouch for Mark's entire and disinterested reformation.

With an intense dislike to the world in general, Arthur was considering how to prevent his wife from meeting Lady Elizabeth, and how to be out of the way before the report should spread of Mark's addresses, when everything else was driven from his mind by the arrival of the papers, with the announcement of the fire at Martindale.

The safety of the infant family of the Honourable Lieutnant-Colonel Martindale was the first news that met his eye; next, that of the death of Mrs. Nesbit, — the chief thought that occupied him in his hasty homeward journey.

He had been taught to think himself her heir; and though never forgiven for his marriage, hoped that the will might not have been altered, and considered that whether it were in his favour or not, so large a property coming into the family, could not fail to render his circumstances more easy, by enabling his father to augment his allowance, which, though ample in itself, appeared far from sufficient to a man with expensive tastes and an increasing family. The hope of independence, and of not being obliged to wish success to Gardner, was an opening into liberty and happiness.

By night he was at the parsonage, and Violet in his arms as soon as the door was opened. That moment was perfect — he was so eagerly tender, so solicitous lest she should have been injured by terror or exertion, so shocked at her peril in his absence. In the fulness of her heart, she even asked him to come and see the children safely asleep.

"Now? What should I do that for!"

There was no unkindness, but the full felicity of the evening was marred.

There was no room for him at the parsonage, and an apartment in the empty house had been fitted up for him, so that she only saw him for an hour of confused talk over the events of the fire, and Theodora's condition, which was very uncomfortable; for though the fever was slight, the burns and bruises were in an unsatisfactory state, and eyes,

arms, and hands of very little use. She was patient, and resolute as ever, and so grateful to her nurses, that waiting on her was a pleasure.

In fact, attendance on her was the only resource for occupying Lady Martindale, who, when not thus engaged, was listless and dejected, attending to nothing that passed around her, and sometimes giving way to inconsolable bursts of grief. It was as if her aunt had been her one idea in life, and without her she could turn to nothing else. Violet was very anxious to prevent the children from molesting her, and in much dread of their troubling her, now that all were in such close quarters. It was trying to be engaged with Theodora, and to hear the little feet and voices where they were not intended to be.

But when she was able to hasten to the rescue, she beheld Helen in Lady Martindale's lap, and Johnnie by her side, all three intent on making bouquets; and all apologies and proposals to fetch them away were replied to by assurances of their goodness, and the pleasure afforded by their company.

It appeared that while playing in the garden, the little brother and sister had been, as it were, fascinated by watching her fixed melancholy figure in the drawing room. Again and again they had peeped in at the window, striving to forget, but ever attracted by the sweet compassion of their hearts; till at last, after much pausing and whispering, they had betaken themselves to the corner of the garden where cousin Hugh had given permission to gather as they liked, and at the expense of his own small fingers, Johnnie had pulled the first bud of sweet-brier. Lady Martindale had felt a soft touch, and heard a little, timid, coaxing voice — "Grandmamma, may we? Would you like this little, young rose?" while towards her was raised a face delicate and glowing with pale pink like the bud itself.

Grandchildren and flower were at once in her bosom. Warm, womanly child-love had been forced down to a far corner of her heart; but there it was, and like the rod

piercing to the hidden spring, that fragrant gift of love touched it home, and thenceforth it was such fondling as Violet almost feared might be spoiling, especially of Helen; who, however unruly or exacting she might be, seemed only to endear herself the more, and was visibly far more her grandmother's darling than her gentle, well-behaved brother. This new affection for the children opened her heart to their mother, on whom she leant more than she knew. To her she talked of all her aunt's unwearied fondness and care, ever since she had come into her hands an orphan in her infancy. There had been real and entire devotion to each other on the part of the aunt and niece; and the affection she had been able to inspire, together with the solemn feelings towards the newly dead, gave her memory a softness that almost enabled Violet to think of her in Lady Martindale's point of view, forget her harshness, and the worldly pride for her niece and her family, to which she had sacrificed their best happiness.

It was a melancholy retrospect. Mrs. Nesbit might be said to have perfectly succeeded in the object of her life. She had formed her beloved niece, like the fabled image of snow, moulded by the enchanter and animated by no will but his, and had seen her attain the summit of her wishes, universally admired and distinguished for every talent and grace; while still completely under her influence, and as affectionate and devoted as ever. Could any desire be more fully attained? But there had ever been further craving, disappointment, combats, hatred, avarice, disgust; and with all around that could make old age happy and honourable, it had been a querulous melancholy struggle for power, spent in clutching at the toys that had no pleasure in them — in trying to force worldly advantages on those who cared not for them, then revenging their indifference as a personal insult. She had sunk into the grave without any one having the power to regret her save that one fond, faithful niece, the one creature she had always regarded with genuine unselfish affection.

Lord Martindale, whose wife she had ruled, and whose children had been made unhappy by her, could hardly help owning to himself that her death was a relief to him; and Arthur barely made a fair show of moderate respect, in his anxiety for the property that would free him from embarrassment. His first inquiry was whether the will were burnt. No, it was in the hands of a lawyer, who would bring it on the day of the funeral. Lord Martindale might look reprovingly at Arthur's eagerness, but the matter was no less important to him. He had begun life with an expenditure as large as his income could bear; and as his children had grown up, and unprosperous times had come, he had not been able to contract his expenses. Of late he had almost been in difficulty as to the means of meeting the calls for the year; economy was a thing unknown and uncomprehended by his wife; and the giving up the house in London had been the only reduction he could accomplish. No one else in the family had an idea of self-denial except Theodora, who, perceiving how matters stood, had refused to have a maid of her own, and had begged him no longer to keep a horse for her. Some change ought to be made, but he had gone on in this unsatisfactory manner, trusting that, at Mrs. Nesbit's death, all would be straight. Her West Indian estates and accumulation of wealth must be bequeathed either to his wife or among his children; and in either case he would be set at ease — either relieved from supporting Arthur, or enabled to do so without difficulty.

The funeral took place in full grandeur. Lady Martindale had made it a special request that every one would mourn as if for her mother, and it was just one of the occasions when pomp was needed to supply the place of grief.

The only real mourner shut herself up in her own room, whither Theodora begged Violet to follow her. She found her stretched on her bed, abandoned to grief. It was the sense of orphanhood; the first time she had come so close to death and its circumstances, and it was overpowering sorrow; but Violet had better learnt how to deal with her,

and could venture to caress and soothe — entreat her to remember how much was left to love her — and then listen to what Lady Martindale began as the rehearsal of her aunt's care to shield her from sorrow; but Violet soon saw it was the outpouring of a pent-up grief, that had never dared to come forth. The last time the vault had been opened it had been for the infant she had lost, and just before for the little girls, who had died in her absence. "My dear," she said, "you do not know how it is all brought back to me. It is as if your three darlings were the same I left when we went abroad. Your sweet Helen is exactly like my precious little Anna, whom I little thought I was never to see again! Oh, my babies!"

Violet was quite relieved to find this excessive grief was not spent on her aunt, but that it was the long-restrained sorrow for an affliction in which she could so much better sympathize. It had been of no avail for Mrs. Nesbit, in mistaken kindness, and ignorance of a mother's heart, to prevent her from ever adverting to her darlings; it had only debarred her from the true source of comfort, and left the wound to ache unhealed, while her docile outward placidity was deemed oblivion. The fear of such sorrow had often been near Violet, and she was never able to forget on how frail a tenure she held her first-born; and from the bottom of her heart came her soothing sympathy, as she led her on to dwell on the thought of those innocents, in their rest and safety. Lady Martindale listened as if it was a new message of peace; her tears were softer, and she dwelt fondly on little Anna's pretty ways, speaking, and Violet hearing, as if it had been a loss of to-day, instead of more than thirty long years ago.

Lady Martindale opened a dressing-box, saying how relieved she had been to find it safe, and from a secret drawer drew out a paper and showed Violet some soft locks of chestnut hair. "Their papa gave me these," she said. "My dear aunt would not let me look at them — she thought it hurt me; but I must see if Anna's hair is not just like Helen's.

And then she begged Violet not to be alarmed at the resemblance, and kissed her for saying she was glad of it, and had no fears on that score. She dwelt on these reminiscences as if they were a solace of which she could never taste enough, and did not cease talking over them till Lord Martindale entered. Violet understood his feeling and the reserve hitherto shown to him sufficiently to attempt breaking it down, and ventured, as she quitted the room, to lay her hand on the little curl, and say, "Grandmamma thinks Helen like her little Anna."

Seeing Arthur leaning on the balusters, looking discomposed, she went down to him. "Where have you been?" he said, rather sulkily.

"With your mother; I hope she is growing more calm."

"Very absurd of her to take it so much to heart!" said Arthur, entering the drawing-room. "Have you heard about this will?"

"No. What?"

"Never was such a will on this earth! It ought to be brought into court! I verily believe the old hag studied to make it a parting emanation of malice!"

"Oh, hush! hush!" cried Violet, shocked.

"It is all very well saying Hush, hush; but I should like to know what you mean to live upon."

"What has she done?"

"She has gone and left it all to that child!"

"What child?"

"My son — your boy John, I tell you; but mark you, so as to do no good to a living soul. Not a penny is he to touch till we are all dead, if we starve meantime. She has tied it up to accumulate till my eldest son — or John's, if he has one — comes to the title, and much good may it do him!"

"Poor little dear!" said Violet, inexpressibly pained by his tone.

"Anything but poor! It is 100,000*l.* to begin with, and what will it be when he gets it? Think of that doing nothing,

and of us with no dependence but the trumpery 5000*l.* by the marriage settlements. It is enough to drive one crazy."

"It is a pity," said Violet, frightened by his vehemence.

"It is an end of all chance for me. When she had always taught me to look to it! It is absolute cheating."

"Of late she never led us to expect anything."

"No; and you never took pains to stand well with her. Some people —'

"O, Arthur, Arthur!"

"Well, don't be foolish! You could not help it. Her spitefulness was past reckoning. To see her malice! She knew John and Theodora would not let me be wronged, so she passes them over, and my mother too, for fear it should be made up to me. Was ever man served so before? My own son, as if to make it more aggravating!"

At an unlucky moment Johnnie ran in, and pulled his mother's dress. "Mamma, may Helen dig in the bed by the garden door?"

"Go away!" said Arthur, impatiently. "We can't have you bothering here."

Though inattentive and indifferent to his children, he had never been positively unkind, and the anger of his tone filled the timid child's eyes with tears, as he looked appealingly at his mother, and moved away, lingering, and beginning a trembling "but mamma —"

"Don't stay here!" cried Arthur, in an indiscriminating fit of anger, striking his hand on the table. "Did I not order you to go this moment, Sir?"

Poor Johnnie fled, without hearing his mother's consoling "I'll come;" which only, with her look of grief, further irritated Arthur. "Ay, ay! That 's always the way. Nothing but the boy, whenever I want you."

Violet saw defence would make it worse, and tried to give him the attention he required; though quivering with suppressed distress for his harshness to his poor little boy, whom she could hardly help going at once to comfort. She hardly heard his storming on about the unhappy will, it only

seemed to her like the apple of discord, and great was the relief when it was ended by Lord Martindale's coming down, asking why Johnnie was crying. She hoped this might cause Arthur some compunction; but he only answered, gruffly, "He was troublesome, he is always fretting."

Violet found the poor little fellow with tear-glazed face trying to suppress the still heaving sobs, and be grateful to his grandmamma, who had brought him into her room, and was trying to console him, though unable to discover the secret of his woe. As he sprung to his mother's lap, his grief broke forth afresh. His affection for his father was a deep, distant, almost adoring worship; and the misery inflicted by those looks and words was beyond what could be guessed, save by his mother. He thought himself naughty, without knowing why, and could hardly be soothed by her caresses and assurances that papa was not really angry, but he must not interrupt another time.

"But Mamma, Helen wanted to dig up all cousin Hugh's little green things."

Violet was thus reminded that she must seek after her daughter, whom she found revelling in mischief, and was obliged to sentence to dire disgrace, causing general commiseration, excepting that her papa, ignorant that it was his own fault, declared children to be the greatest plagues in the world.

She saw him no more in private; but grieved at his moodiness all the evening, and at bed-time watched a red spark moving to and fro in the garden. Her heavy sigh made Theodora ask what was the matter.

"I wish Arthur would not stay out in the dew. He has a little cough already," said she, putting forward the care that would best bear mention.

"You used to be above caring for dews and night airs."

"I must for him and Johnnie!" said Violet.

"Ah! what do you say to your son's prospects?"

"I don't suppose it will make much difference to him,"

was the dejected answer, Violet's eyes still following the red end of the cigar in the darkness.

"Well! that is contempt for wealth! Fancy what will be in his hands. I thought you would be moralizing on the way to bring him up to use it."

"I have not thought of that," said Violet; "besides, it will be long enough before he has it."

"What! will it not be when he is of age?"

"No, when he comes to the title."

"Oh! I see. Mamma did not understand that! She thought it absolutely left to him. How is it, then?"

"It is put in trust till either he, or John's son, if he should have one, comes to the title."

"Then, it does you no good?"

"Only harm," Violet could not help saying.

"How harm? It might be worse for you to have it."

"Most likely," said Violet's submissive voice. "But it vexes Arthur so much!" and the tears fell unseen.

"Well it may!" said Theodora. "One cannot say what one thinks of it *now*, but — Poor Arthur! I was very much afraid she was going to leave it to me. Now I wish she had."

"I wish so too."

"It was silly of me to warn her that Arthur should have his share; but after all, I don't regret it. I would not have had it on false pretences. Did you hear when the will was dated?"

"September, 18—."

"When Johnnie was a baby. Ah! I remember. Well, I am glad we all forfeited it. I think it is more respectable. I only wish mamma had come in for it, because she is the right person, and papa is a good deal straitened. That really was a shame! Why did not she let them have it?"

"Arthur thinks it was for fear we should be helped."

"No doubt," said Theodora. "Well. I wish! It is a horrid thing to find people worse after they are dead than one thought them. There! I have had it out. I could not have borne to keep silence. Now, let us put the disgusting

money matter out of our heads for good and all. I did not think *you* would have been distressed at such a thing, Violet."

"I don't want it," said Violet, amid her tears. "It is Arthur's disappointment, and the knowing I brought it on him."

"Nonsense!" cried Theodora. "If I had Arthur here, I would scold him well; and as to you, he may thank you for everything good belonging to him. Ten million fortunes would not be worth the tip of your little finger to him, and you know he thinks so. Without you, and with this money, he would be undone. Now, don't be silly! You have got your spirits tired out, and sleep will make you a sensible woman."

Violet was always the better for an affectionate scolding, and went to bed, trusting that Arthur's disappointment might wear off with the night. But his aunt's inheritance had been too much the hope of his life, for him to be without a strong sense of injury, and his embarrassments made the loss a most serious matter. He applied to his father for an increase of allowance, but he could not have chosen a worse time; Lord Martindale had just advanced money for the purchase of his company, and could so ill afford to supply him as before, that but for the sake of his family, he would have withdrawn part of his actual income. So, all he obtained was a lecture on extravagance and neglect of his wife and children; and thus rendered still more sullen, he became impatient to escape from these grave looks and reproofs, and to return to town before the disclosure of Mr. Gardner's courtship. He made it his pretext that Violet was unwell and overworked in the general service; and she was, in truth, looking very ill and harassed; but he was far more the cause than were her exertions, and it was a great mortification to be removed from his parents and sister when, for the first time, she found herself useful to them, and for such an ungracious reason too, just when they were so much drawn together by the dangers they had shared, and the

children seemed to be making progress in their grandmother's affections. Poor Johnnie, too! it was hard to rob him of another month of country air, just as he was gaining a little strength and colour.

But pleading was useless; the mention of Johnnie revived the grievance; and she was told she must not expect everything to give way to that boy of hers; every one was ready enough to spoil him without his help. He would not stay crammed into this small house, with the children eternally in the way, and his father as black as thunder, with no diversion, and obliged to sleep out in that den of a cottage, in a damp half-furnished room,— an allegation hardly true, considering Violet's care to see the room aired and fitted up to suit his tastes; but he was determined, and she had not even the consolation of supposing care for her the true reason; the only ground she could find for reconciling herself to the measure was, that night walks were not mending his cough, which, though so slight that he did not acknowledge it, and no one else perceived it, still made her uneasy. Especially Violet felt the ingratitude of leaving Theodora in her weak, half-recovered state; but it was almost as if he had a sort of satisfaction in returning his father's admonitions on the care of his wife, by making it a plea for depriving them of her in their need, and he fixed his day without remorse.

CHAPTER V.

E'en in sleep, pangs felt before,
Treasur'd long in memory's store,
Bring in visions back their pain,
Melt into the heart again,
By its crost affections taught
Chastened will and sobered thought.
ÆSCHYLUS. — *Anstice.*

ARTHUR did not succeed in eluding Lady Elizabeth. She called the day after the funeral, begging especially to see Mrs. Martindale. She looked absent and abstracted, while Lord Martindale was talking to her, and soon entreated Violet to come with her for a short drive.

No sooner were they in the carriage than she said, "Violet, my dear, can you or Arthur tell me anything of this Mr. Gardner?"

"I know very little of him personally," said Violet, for he was too much an associate of her husband's for her to be willing to expose him; "but are you sure we mean the same person?"

"Quite sure. Did you not hear that Arthur met him at Gothlands?"

"No; I have had very little talk with him since he came back, and this fire has put everything out of our minds."

"Of course it must, my dear. However, Arthur came with Mr. Herries to dine there, and met Mr. Gardner as an old friend; so he must be the same, and I am particularly anxious for some account of him. I must tell you why — I know I am safe with you, but you will be very much surprised, after all her declarations —"

"O, Lady Elizabeth, it cannot be that."

"I have always been prepared for something of the sort. But what, my dear?" seeing her agitation, and quickly infected by it.

"O, don't let her," was all Violet could utter.

"Tell me! what is he? — what do you know of him? They spoke of him as once having been extravagant —"

Violet drew a long breath, and tried to speak with composure. "He is a dreadful man, gambling, betting, dissipated — such a person that Arthur never lets him come near me or the children. How could he dare think of her?"

"Can it be the same?" said Lady Elizabeth, infinitely shocked, but catching at the hope. "This man is Lady Fotheringham's nephew."

"Yes, he is," said Violet, sadly. "There is no other cousin named Mark. Why, don't you remember all the talk about Mrs. Finch?"

So little had Lady Elizabeth heeded scandal, that she had hardly known these stories, and had not identified them with the name of Gardner. Still she strove to think the best.

"Arthur will be able to tell," she said; "but every one seems fully satisfied of his reformation — the curate of the parish and all. I do not mean that I could bear to think of her being attached to a person who had been to blame. Her own account of him alarmed me enough, poor dear child; but when I hear of the clergyman and Theresa Marstone, and all admiring his deep feeling of repentance —"

"How can he be so wicked?" exclaimed Violet.

"You are convinced that he is not sincere?"

"Why, of course, one does not like to say anything uncharitable; but there is something shocking in the notion of his talking of being good. If he did repent he would know how horrible it would be for him to marry Emma —"

"He does affect great humility. He declares that no one can be more conscious of his unfitness than himself; but he was betrayed into this confession of his sentiments — Emma's purity and devotedness, as Theresa writes to me, having been such powerful instruments in leading him to a better course. If it was not for poor Emma's fortune, one might trust this more! Oh! Violet, I never so much was inclined to wish that her brother had been spared!"

"But surely — surely, Emma cannot like him?"

"I grieve to say that she and her friend have been in one of their fits of enthusiasm. He seemed to accord with their ideal of a penitent — only longing for stricter rules than are to be found with us. From what I have heard, I should have been much less surprised if he had become a monk of La Trappe; in fact, I was almost afraid of it."

"And does not this undeceive them?"

"No; poor Emma's only doubt is because she cannot bear to be unstable, and to desert the work to which she was almost pledged; but she says she is ashamed to perceive how much the sacrifice would cost her. She adds, that decide as she may, he concurs with her in devoting everything to the restoration of the Priory."

"Poor Emma! He has debts enough to swallow two-thirds! And Miss Marstone, what does she say?"

"His becoming a suitor seems to have been a surprise and disappointment to her; but if she thinks him a pupil of her own, or expects to govern the Priory in poor Emma's stead, she will be in his favour. No; I have no hope from Theresa Marstone's discretion."

"The rest of the family?"

"Theresa despises the others too much to attend to them. Mr. Randall seems to be startled at the present aspect of affairs, and asks me to come; and I should have set off this morning, but that I thought I might learn something from you and Arthur."

"Every one would tell you the same. He was expelled from the University, and has gone on shockingly ever since, breaking his mother's heart! Poor Emma! after dreading every gentleman!"

"I fear she has much to suffer. He made her think him not a marrying man, and put her off her guard. Did you say he was agreeable?"

"Perhaps I might think so if I knew nothing about him; but I have always had a repugnance to him, and it is all I can do not dislike him more than is right. If I saw him speak to Johnnie, I think I should!"

"And now tell me, for I ought to have every proof, if you know anything that would convince Emma that this present repentance is assumed?"

Violet coloured excessively. "Arthur could tell," she said, half choked; and as Lady Elizabeth still waited, she was obliged to add, "He was active in the same way at the last races. I know there are things going on still that a man who really meant to reform would have broken off. Arthur could give you proofs."

Violet could not bear to be more explicit. Her own secret feeling was that Mr. Gardner was her husband's evil genius, leading him astray, and robbing her of his affection, and she was not far mistaken. Sneers, as if he was under her government, were often employed to persuade him to neglect her, and continue his ruinous courses; and if she

shrunk from Gardner, he in return held her in malicious aversion, both as a counter influence and as a witness against him. It was the constant enmity of light to darkness, of evil to innocence.

The whole drive was spent in conversing on this engrossing theme; Lady Elizabeth lamenting the intimacy with Sarah Theresa, a clever, and certainly in many respects an excellent person, but with a strong taste for singularity and for dominion, who had cultivated Emma's naturally ardent and clinging nature into an exclusive worship of her; and, by fostering all that was imaginative in her friend's composition, had led her to so exalted an estimate of their own ideal that they alike disdained all that did not coincide with it, and spurned all mere common sense. Emma's bashfulness had been petted and promoted as unworldly, till now, like the holes in the philosopher's cloak, it was self-satisfaction instead of humility. This made the snare peculiarly dangerous, and her mother was so doubtful how far she would be guided, as to take no comfort from Violet's assurances that Mr. Gardner's character could be proved to be such that no woman in her senses could think, a second time, of accepting him.

"I cannot tell," said poor Lady Elizabeth; "they will think all wiped out by his reform. Emma speaks already of aiding him to redeem the past. Ah! my dear," in answer to a look, "you have not seen my poor child of late: you do not know how much more opinionative she has become, or rather, Theresa has made her. I wish she could have been more with you."

"I never was enough of a companion to her," said Violet. "In my best days I was not up to her; and now, between cares and children, I grow more dull every day."

"Your best days! my dear child. Why, how old are you?"

"Almost twenty-two," said Violet; "but I have been married nearly six years. I am come into the heat and glare of middle life. Not that I mean to complain," said she,

rousing her voice to cheerfulness; "but household matters do not make people companions for those who have their youthfulness, and their readings, and schemes."

"I wish Emma could have been drawn to take interest in your sound, practical life."

"If she would make a friend of Theodora!"

"Yes, but the old childish fear of her is not gone; and Emma used to think her rather wild and flighty, and so indeed did I; but how she is changed! I have been much pleased with conversations with her of late. Do you think it is owing to Mr. Hugh Martindale's influence?"

"In great part it is. What a blessing it is to them all to have him here."

"Ah! it has been one of the things that made me most dread Theresa, that she will not like that good man."

"What can she say against him?"

"I don't exactly understand them. They called him a thorough Anglican, and said he did not feel the universal pulse! Now, I know it has been unfortunate for Emma that our own vicar does not enter into these ways of thinking; but I thought, when Mr. Hugh Martindale came into the neighbourhood, that there would be some one to appeal to; but I believe Theresa will trust to no one but of her own choosing."

They had come back to the parsonage-gate, and Lady Elizabeth set Violet down, promising to write as soon as she arrived at Gothlands; Arthur was sauntering in the garden, and as soon as the carriage was out of sight, came to meet her.

"O, Arthur, Lady Elizabeth wanted to speak to you. Cannot you catch her?"

"I? No. Nonsense."

"She wanted to ask you about Mr. Gardner. Was it he whom you met at Gothlands?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Poor Lady Elizabeth! Is it not shocking that he has been making an offer to Emma?"

"He has, has he? Well, and what is she going to do?"

"There can be but one answer," said Violet. "Lady Elizabeth came to hear about him."

"A fine chance for gossip for you."

"I was forced to tell her," said she, trying to hide the pain given her by his contemptuous tone. "I would not have spoken if I could have helped it."

"Ay!" said Arthur, "as he says, set on a lady to talk of her husband's friends."

"But, oh! Arthur, what could I do? Think of poor Emma."

"Emma is a fool."

"Only you must not be angry with me. I would have said nothing without cause, but when it comes to this, — and he is pretending to be reformed."

"Well, so he might be if you would let him."

"But, Arthur!" then eagerly seizing a new hope, "you don't mean that he is really improving? Oh! has he given up those horses, and released you?"

He turned petulantly away. "How can he? You have taken away any chance of it now. You have done for him, and it is of no use to go on any more about it."

He marched off to his own abode, while she was obliged to sit down under the verandah to compose herself before Theodora should see her.

Theodora perceived that much was amiss; but was spared much anxiety by not being with the family, and able to watch her brother. The cottage was completely furnished from the wreck of Martindale; but the removal thither was deferred by her slow recovery. Though not seriously ill, she had been longer laid up than had been anticipated in a person so healthy and strong; the burns would not heal satisfactorily, and she was weak and languid. It seemed as if the unsparing fatigues she had been in the habit of undergoing; her immoderate country walks — her over late and over early hours, had told on her frame, and rendered the effects of her illness difficult to shake off. Or, thought Violet,

those tidings might be the secret cause, although she never referred to them, and continued not merely patient, but full of vigour of mind, cheerful, and as independent and enterprising as submission to orders permitted. Her obedience to irksome rules was so ready and implicit, that Violet marvelled, till she perceived that it was part of her system of combat with self-will; and she took the departure of her sister in the same manner, forbearing to harass Violet with lamentations; and when her mother deplored it, made answer, "It is my fault. If I had not persuaded Arthur out of living at Brogden, we should be staying with them."

As to the chance of permanent disfigurement, she treated it very coolly, listening with indifference to her mother's frequent inquiries of the surgeon. "Never mind, Mamma, you and Violet will keep up the beauty of the family till Helen comes out."

The first time she was able to come down stairs was the last evening before they were to depart. One of Arthur's sparks of kindly feeling awoke when he beheld his once handsome, high-spirited sister, altered and wrapped up, entering the room with an invalid step and air; and though she tried to look about in a bright *dégagé* manner, soon sinking into the cushioned chair by the window with a sigh of languor. The change was greater than he had anticipated from his brief visits to her in her bed-room; and, recollecting the cause of the injuries, he perceived the ingratitude of depriving her of Violet; but his contrition came too late, for he had already exchanged his leave of absence with another officer.

All that was in his power was to wait upon her with that engaging attention that rendered him so good a nurse. He was his pleasantest self, and she was so lively as to put every one else into good spirits. It was pretty to see the universal pleasure in her recovery — the weeding woman, going home late, and looking up at the window to see if she was there, as Miss Helen had promised, and curtseying, hardly able to speak for joy and grief together, when Theo-

dora beckoned her to the window, and asked after her children. The dumb page, too, had watched an hour for her crossing the hall; and when Arthur would have taken the tea from him, to hand to her, he gave such a beseeching glance as was quite irresistible, and the more affecting as Theodora's hands were not yet in condition to converse with him, and she was forced to constitute Johnnie her interpreter.

It was long since any of them had spent so happy an evening; and at night Arthur insisted on helping her upstairs, and said, "I declare it is a shame not to leave you Violet. Suppose you keep her till you are all right again?"

"O, thank you, Arthur; but —" for Violet looked doubtful.

"Why, I thought you wanted to stay, Violet?" said Arthur.

"If you could."

"Too late for that; but you must settle it between you before to-morrow morning. Good night."

Lady Martindale warmly pressed Violet to stay, and she found it much worse to have personally to make the choice than to be only a piece of property at Arthur's disposal. She was, however, firm, saying that he would be uncomfortable without her; and she was grateful to Theodora for perceiving her motives, and preventing further entreaties.

"You are right," said Theodora, when her mother was gone. "It would not be fit to leave him with an empty house, so I must yield you up; but I cannot bear to think of you in London."

"I am used to it," said Violet, with her patient smile.

"And it will not be four years before we meet again. I shall try hard to come to you in the autumn."

"How comfortable that would be! But you must not be uneasy about me, nor put any one out of the way. I can get on very well, as long as I have Johnnie."

It was not till both had laid down to rest, and the room was dark, that Theodora said, "I understand it now. Her

poor sister must have brought her into some bad foreign society, from which he could only rescue her by marrying her."

So abrupt was this commencement that Violet had to recollect who was meant, and so decided was the tone, that she asked, "What have you heard?"

"Nothing fresh, have you?"

"No. Arthur had heard nothing from Mr. Mark Gardner; and I am afraid we shall hear no more till John answers my letter."

"No matter; I have found out how it must have been. Lady Fotheringham, of whom he made a sort of mother, always liked Jane. Depend upon it, she was anxious about the way in which poor Georgina was reported to be going on abroad, and told Percy, when she died, to try if he could do anything to save Jane. You see he goes to Italy, and there finds, of course, that there is no way of fulfilling his aunt's wishes but by sacrificing himself."

"You have arranged it all most fully!"

"See if I am not right — or, rather, you will not see; but I know that was the way. It is his nature to be fantastically generous, as some people would call it; and as long as he is the same Percival Fotheringham, the rest is as nothing. I was unjust at the first moment. Jane has a better nature, which he can develope. There is a sense of religion to work on — a power of adaptation to those she is with; and if what she has seen in Italy has shocked her and made her turn to him, he may be the making of her. She is clever enough; and when she finds that nothing but truth and honesty will succeed with him, she will learn them at last."

"How glad I am you take it in this way."

"This quiet time has been good for me," said Theodora. "It would have been maddening to have had no pause before waking to ordinary life."

"Then the fire came at the right time for you."

"Have you not read of men rushing into battle, hoping each shot would strike them?"

"O, Theodora!"

"It did not last long. Don't be frightened. Woman fear, and the stifling smell, and burning feel, and the sight of the red hot gulf, were enough to drive it off. I shall never forget the touch of the floor in Charles's room! I thought of nothing but the fire. The feeling only came back with the fainting. I remember a confused notion that I was glad to be dying with you holding my head and papa so kind. How savage I felt when every one would rouse me, and tell me I was better! I was in hopes the world was all over with me; but I see I have a great deal to do first, and the comfort of lying torpid here has been very great. I have had time to be stunned, and to get a grasp of *it* and of my own mind."

"Dear Theodora! It is indeed sometimes a blessing to be laid up. It brings out so much kindness. It is the easiest of all the crosses."

"I should not wonder if my rampant health had helped to make me the more wayward," said Theodora. "I would not but have been ill for the sake of the kindness from my father and mother. I was sure of you, but theirs is — It has given me spirit to look out upon life."

"I hope there is peace at least in the look."

"There is. It is not worse than before, except the vanishing of a lingering foolish hope, and that is safest. Repentance must always be there. My life is like myself; the wounds may heal, but the marks will remain and the freshness and glow will never return here. I am glad I am so much altered. I should not like to be again within the pale of attractive people."

"It is strange to hear you say such things so calmly."

"I made up my mind long ago. In following poor Georgina — or rather, my own self-will — I threw away the bloom of life. Percy warned me that those who reject light crosses have heavy loads imposed. I made what now seems hardly a cross of reed, into a scourge! Oh, Violet! Would that I had done no harm but to myself by those races!"

"Hush!" said Violet's smothered voice.

"But for that," said Theodora, recovering steadiness of tone, "I should bear everything peacefully. I was unworthy of Percy, and am better off than I deserve. Oh, Violet! I have wished to thank you for making me go to Baden, and promising that if I would submit, guidance would come. There it was, the instant I really sought it. What would have become of me if I had not been haunted by your look and your words? How many times they saved me from accepting Lord St. Erme! And if I had, how my self-will, and pride, and jealousy would have grown! and how wretched I should be making him now!"

"It is much better as it is."

"Yes, whatever pain I did give him by my very shameful usage, it would have been far worse to have gone on. I was thankful that I was stopped. Now I think I see my own life. There are my home duties; and oh! how could I have spoken as I once did of papa! How shocking it must have seemed to you!"

"I do not know what it was, but it was under great provocation, and you did not understand him then."

"No, you and Hugh drove me to him, and in seeing him pleased with anything I can do for him, there is solid happiness. I have learnt to enter into his affection and deep feeling and anxieties, and I would not have missed these four years of reciprocity with him for anything! And I shall get on better with mamma now. I fancy she has a different nature after all, from what my aunt forced on her. Well, then, you know I have long set up for a maiden aunt, and there is John, who might want a housekeeper. Or if I am of no use to my own folks, there are the poor always. Perhaps I may come to Emma Brandon's priory. It would be fine discipline to be under Mother Theresa."

This unexpected pleasantry Violet could only answer by a groan.

"Seriously," continued Theodora, "my doubt would be whether it would be right to turn to such a course only when

one has nothing else to do. It is a different thing from giving the energies and wishes and visions of youth, as Emma has done. I could only offer the worn-out. But that is speculation. There is present duty at home and in the village, and brightness in your children, and my hopes are on John. I have used him vilely, because he tried to teach me to take to you, and I do long to see him and ask his pardon, and you will help me, so that he shall believe in my sorrow, and we will be a sober old brother and sister together."

"I believe he wishes for nothing more. He will feel your having worked for him, instead of saving anything of your own."

"I had little to care for; my childhood had few recollections, and I had nothing of Helen's. It was a pleasure to work for him. Do you know when I saw that marble chess-table which had belonged to the parsonage, and which Percy had left in John's charge, a horrid feel came that I would not save it for Jane, and I left it. Then I remembered that was a nasty spiteful bit of revenge, and I hated myself, and dashed in when I really did know that it was not safe. I was altogether mad, I believe. I felt desperate, and rather enjoyed facing danger for it. And then I felt the heat of the fire from the gallery again, and the spout from the fire-engine came, and the smoke was so thick that I missed my footing with that great heavy thing, and fell down stairs to the first landing, and I believe that must have been what hurt my hand and side so much."

Then as she heard Violet's tightened breath at the thought of the frightful peril,

"Well for me I did not perish with these wild thoughts! I am glad I have told you at last. I have felt as if I ought to confess it, and yet I was ashamed. Is the thing safe?"

"Yes, I saw it at Brogden; but oh to think of it!"

"I am glad it is safe; it was John's charge, and he ought to restore it: but you will dream of it, like poor little Johnnie, if you take it so much to heart. I should not have told you at night. Put it out of your head, and let us sleep in peace."

"Good night, dear sister. Thank you for talking to me. O, this is better than the night we parted before."

"As much better as it is to have found one's anchor than to be tossed at the will of the waves. That was a frightful time. Thank heaven that you made me feel for the cable! There is a dreary voyage to come, but after all, every day we end the Creed with "The life everlasting."

CHAPTER VI.

What have I? Shall I dare to tell?
A comfortless and hidden well,
A well of love, it may be deep,
I trust it is, and never dry.
What matter if the waters sleep
In silence and obscurity.

WORDSWORTH.

VIOLET experienced the trials to which she knew she was returning. For some time past her husband's habits had been growing less and less domestic, and his disappointment alienated him still more. It was as if Mrs. Nesbit had left behind her a drop of poison, that perverted and envenomed the pride he used to take in his son, as heir to the family honours, and made him regard the poor child almost in the light of a rival, while he seemed to consider the others as burdens, and their number a hardship and misfortune.

He was so impatient of interruption from them, that Violet kept them carefully out of his way, while he was in the house, and this was seldom for a long space of time. All the fancied trials of the first year of her marriage seemed to have actually come upon her! She hardly saw him from morning to night, and when he did spend an evening at home, he was sullen and discontented, and found fault with everything. She was far from well, but his days of solicitude were gone by, and he was too much wrapped up in his own concerns to perceive her failure in strength, and the effort it cost her to be cheerful. The children were her great solace, but the toil of attending to them was almost beyond her powers, and if it had not been for her boy, she felt as

if she must have been quite overwhelmed. Quiet, gentle, and thoughtful, he was a positive assistance in the care of his sisters; and to read with him, hear his remarks, watch his sweet obedience, and know herself the object of his earnest affection, was her chief enjoyment, though even here there was anxiety. His innocence and lovingness had something unearthly, and there was a precocious understanding, a grave serious turn of mind, and a want of childish mirth, which added to the fears caused by his fragile health. Play was not nearly so pleasant to him as to sit by her, reading or talking, or to act as her little messenger; and it was plain that he missed fondness from his father almost as much as she did for him. To be in the room with papa was his most earnest desire, and it saddened her to see that little slight figure silent in the corner, the open book on his lap, but his pale face, soft dark eyes, and parted lips, intent on every movement of his father, till the instant a want was expressed, or the least occasion for a service offered, there was a bound to execute it, and the inattentive indifferent "thank you" was enough to summon up the rosy hue of delight. Would Arthur only have looked, how could he have helped being touched? But he continued neglectful and unheeding, while the child's affection seemed to thrive the more under disregard.

Violet's only satisfaction was in the absence of Mr. Gardner. She heard constantly from Lady Elizabeth Brandon, but there was little that was hopeful in that quarter. Emma's heart was more entirely in the power of her suitor, than even their fears had anticipated. She had kept so entirely aloof from gentlemen, and so suspiciously repelled the most ordinary attention, that when once she had permitted any intimacy, the novelty gave it a double charm. He had come upon her at first as one bowed down with sorrow for the follies of his youth, seeking only for the means of repairing what was past, and professing that happiness was over, and all he could hope was to evidence the depth of his repentance by his devotion and self-sacrifice in the cause of

the Church. Then, when at unawares, he allowed it to be discovered by Theresa that the heart supposed to be awake only to remorse, had been gained by the earnestness and excellence of her young friend, and that in her was the most powerful means of consoling and aiding him, when he seemed sunk in the depths of despair at having allowed his sentiments to transpire, and only too much humiliated by the idea of being named together with Miss Brandon, it was impossible but that Emma's gentle and enthusiastic spirit should go more than half way to raise him from his despondency. She could not believe his errors so great, after all; or even if they were, who would not overlook them, and rejoice to have the power of comforting such a penitent? Theresa Marstone, with a woman's latent love of romance, was prime confidante to both, encouraged all, and delighted in the prospect of being supreme in the Priory, and moulding the pattern household of the pair formed and united under her auspices.

In the midst of such a dream as this, what chance had Lady Elizabeth of convincing the friends that their penitent, scarcely persuaded to relinquish plans of a hermitage, was a spendthrift adventurer, seeking to repair his extravagance with the estates of Rickworth?

Emma shed indignant tears, and protested that it was cruel to bring up his past faults; talked of the Christian duty of forgiving the returning sinner; and when Lady Elizabeth showed that he had very recently been engaged in his usual courses, Theresa, with a sensible face and reasonable voice, argued that ordinary minds could not enter into the power of the Church's work, and adduced many cases of equally sudden change of life.

She did not mention whether there was always the heiress of ten thousand a year ready as the reward.

The list of charges against Mark's character deepened every day, and added to poor Lady Elizabeth's horror, but he always contrived to render them as nothing to Emma. He had always confessed them beforehand either to her or to Theresa, with strong professions of sorrow, and so softened

and explained away, that they were ready to receive each fresh accusation as an exaggeration of a fault long past, and deeply regretted, and only admired their injured Mark the more. Lady Elizabeth wrote to beg Violet to give her the clue which she had said Arthur possessed to Mark's actual present character.

In much distress, Violet wrote the letter, mentioning some disgraceful transactions which she knew to have been taking place at the very time when the good curate believed his friend sincerely repentant. She had heard them not from Arthur, but from Mrs. Bryanstone, who always learnt from her brother every such piece of gossip; but still, after what had passed, and Lady Elizabeth's appeal direct to Arthur, she thought it her duty to tell him before she sent the letter, and to ask if the facts were correct.

It was a most unpleasant duty; but Arthur was not in such a mood as when first she had mentioned the subject to him. He muttered something about the intense folly of a woman who could believe a word out of Gardner's mouth; said if Emma desired to be made miserable for life she could not take a better way; wished he had never set eyes on the fellow, and then, grumbling at Violet's begging him to read the letter, he cast his eye over it, and said it was all true, and there was worse too, if Lady Elizabeth did but know it; but what this was, he would not tell her. He made no objection to her sending the letter, saying that he supposed it must be done, since she was asked; but it was all her doing, and Lady Elizabeth might have gone to some one else; and inconsistently ended with, "After all, what 's the use of making such an uproar about it? Such things have happened twenty times before, and will again."

"Not with my poor Emma, I hope. Imagine her with such a man as that!"

"Well! there are plenty of such couples. I wonder what would become of the world if wives were not better than their husbands."

Every rational person at Gothlands thought this letter

conclusive; Emma herself was shaken; but a walk in the shrubbery with Mark settled it in her mind that his newly-formed wishes of amendment had then been weak; he had not then seen her; he had not learnt so much as at present. He had not been able to confess these deeds, because others, who had now spoken, were concerned in them; but now it was a relief to be able to tell all to his Emma! The end of it was, that Emma herself was almost ready to press forward the marriage, so as to give him the means of clearing himself from the debts, which, as he insinuated, were the true cause of Colonel Martindale's accusations. He forgave him, however, though if all was known of his dealings with Arthur Martindale—! And then there was a long confidential talk with Theresa Marstone, after which she told Lady Elizabeth that though Mr. Gardner spared Emma's feelings with regard to her friend, there could be no doubt that Colonel Martindale had done much to lead him astray.

At last, as a dutiful concession, Emma resolved on a compromise, and put him on his probation for a year. This was particularly inconvenient to him, but he was very resigned and humble; "perhaps he had hoped more from her affection, but he knew it was his penalty, and must submit. If there was but some religious house to which he could retire for the intermediate space; for he dreaded the effect of being sent back to the world."

Theresa was wrought upon to counsel haste; but Emma had principle at the bottom of her effervescence of folly, and was too right-minded, as well as too timid, to act in direct opposition to her mother, however she might be led to talk. Therefore they parted, with many tears on Emma's part, and tender words and promises on Mark's. Lady Elizabeth had little hope that he would not keep them; but she took advantage of the reprieve, to conduct Emma to make visits amongst her relations, sober people, among whom sense was more likely to flourish, and among whom Mr. Gardner could never dare to show himself.

He went, as he told Emma, to seek for some continental

convent, where perhaps he might be received as a boarder, and glean hints for the Priory. Ordinary minds believed that his creditors being suspicious of the delay of his marriage with the heiress, had contributed to this resolution.

He spent a few days in London on his way, came to call on Colonel Martindale, and was much with him, as Violet afterwards found, though she did not know of it at the time.

She perceived the renewal of his influence in a project of which Arthur began to talk, of leaving the army and establishing himself at Boulogne. Though by rigid economy and self-denial she had continued to make the original sum apportioned to her cover all household expenses, and his promotion had brought an increase of income, Arthur declared that, with such a family, his means were inadequate to the requirements of his profession, and that unless his father could assist them further, they must reside abroad. Lord Martindale treated the threat with great displeasure, and to Violet it was like annihilation. When thankful for Mark Gardner's absence, she was to be made to pursue him, probably in order that he might continue to prey on Arthur in secret, and then, at the year's end, bring them as witnesses that he had abstained from open transgression; she was to see her husband become the idling Englishman abroad, in the society most likely to be his ruin; to have her children exposed to the disadvantages of a foreign education — what more was wanting to her distress? She ventured to expostulate on their account; but Arthur laughed, and told her they would learn French for nothing; and when she spoke of the evils of bringing up a boy in France, it was with the look which pained her so acutely, that she was answered, "No fear but that he will be looked after: he is of consequence in the family."

Never had the future looked so desolate; but sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. She had the root of peace and strength, and had long been trained in patient trust and endurance. To pray, to strive, to dwell on words of comfort, to bear in mind the blessings of the cross, to turn

resolutely from gloomy contemplations and to receive thankfully each present solace, — these were the tasks she set herself, and they bore the fruit of consolation and hidden support. Her boy's affection and goodness, the beauty and high health of her little girls, and the kindlier moments when Arthur's better nature shone out, were balm and refreshment, because she accepted them as gifts from the Fatherly Hand that laid the trial upon her.

Her submissive distress so far worked on Arthur, that she heard no more of the Boulogne scheme for the present; and she drove it out of her mind, grateful for his silence, whether it was only from consideration for her, or whether he had really relinquished the design, now that Mr. Gardner was no longer near to maintain his ascendency.

The summer was dreary at Brogden, as well as in Cadogan-place. Theodora soon was able to call herself well, and to resume her usual avocations; but she had not the same sense of energy and strength of body, and her days were combats with inertness and fatigue. She did not slacken her exertions, but they had no zest, and she suffered for them. Moreover, she was uneasy about Arthur and his wife; and to partake her father's confidence was to share his many anxieties, and to be perplexed by his cares as well as her own. With her mother there were other difficulties. Lady Martindale had been kept so far apart from her daughter, that now it seemed as if they could not amalgamate, and when Theodora no longer was ill, the old habit of reserve returned. Assiduously did Theodora wait on her, read to her, and go out with her in the carriage; but still without becoming familiar, or being able to cheer her spirits. In truth, after having been for years an obedient attendant on her aunt, Lady Martindale felt the blank of the want of occupation, and thus the sense of her loss was ever renewed. Science, literature, and accomplishments had been her pursuits, chiefly because her aunt led her to them, and they had been gradually dropped with Mrs. Nesbit's interest in them. In themselves they had no charm for her, and she

turned from them now as painfully recalling what she had lost. Dispirited, and without employment, the natural consequence was that her health suffered, and she became a prey to the varied torments of neuralgia, while Theodora proved herself a better nurse than could have been expected for an illness in which she only half believed.

Many hopes were fixed on John's return; but this was deferred, — he was in the midst of church building, and establishing schemes to which absence would be fatal, and he could only promise to come home next year, when things should be put in train. To his sister he wrote a letter so full of warm affectionate gratitude for her exertions in his behalf, that she was positively soothed and refreshed, and reckoned the more on beginning with him the fraternal union so long delayed, but to which she looked as the solace of her future life.

As to Percival Fotheringham, there was no further explanation of his marriage. John wrote to Violet that he had not heard from him for many months, for it was difficult to keep up a correspondence between Barbuda and the continental towns whither he was journeying. His last letter had spoken of a tour in Italy in contemplation, and that in which he had communicated Lady Fotheringham's death, mentioned some of her last cares being for Jane and Georgina, and how she had tried to leave some provision which might rescue the former from the necessity of following her sister into the undesirable society she found abroad. This only served to confirm Theodora's conjecture.

From other sources no intelligence was gained. London was empty, and Violet saw no one likely to know anything of his movements; and when she heard that Mark Gardner had been in town, and eagerly inquired whether he had been asked, she found that Arthur had forgotten the whole matter. Lady Elisabeth finished the letter, rejoicing in his departure, by saying — "He confirms what I told you of the marriage of his cousin and Mr. Fotheringham, and calls it a lucky thing for her. I had no opportunity of hearing the

particulars." And, finally, Mrs. Bryanstone had heard of Miss Gardner's marriage with one of the Fotheringhams of Worthbourne, and only wanted Mrs. Martindale to strengthen her in the belief that it was the dear, eccentric Crusader.

CHAPTER VII.

'Mid sombre shades of evening dim
Upon the rock so lone, so drear,
Scorning weak frame and sinking limb,
My heart grows bright and bold of cheer;
Out of the depths of stormy night
My hope looks up with cloudless eyes,
And, to the one true deathless light,
Its joyful pinions swiftly rise:
Thanks to the seraph shape that beamed
Benign upon my darkened breast,
So, for her service worthy deemed,
My grateful heart abounds in rest.

FOUQUE'S *Minstrel Love.*

"Wrangerton, August 20th.

You must not be frightened, dearest Violet — Albert is safe; thanks to that most noble-hearted, admirable Lord St. Erme, and above all, thanks to Him who directed this dreadful stroke away from us. I hope you will receive this before you see the newspaper. Mamma has gone up with them, to help them to break it to poor Lady Lucy. May she be supported!

"The history, as far as I can tell you, is this: — The men at the collieries have been as troublesome and insubordinate as ever, seeming to think opposition to Lord St. Erme an assertion of their rights as free-born Englishmen; and at last, finding it impossible to do anything with them as long as they did not depend immediately upon himself, he took the pits into his own hands when Mr. Shoreham went away, a fortnight ago. It seems that Mr. Shoreham, knowing that he was going, had let everything fall into a most neglected state, and the overlookers brought reports to Albert that there were hardly any safety-lamps used in the great pit, and that the galleries were so insufficiently supported that there was great danger in continuing to work

there. However, the reports were contradictory, and after trying in vain to settle what was to be done, Lord St. Erme rode this morning to the collieries, to make a personal inspection, and insist on the men using the Davy-lamp. After trying to dissuade him, Albert proposed to go down with him; but he would not consent — he only smiled, and said there was no need for it. It did not strike Albert till afterwards that he was conscious of the risk, and would not allow another to share it! He was waiting for him, not far from the shaft, when the earth seemed to give way under his feet; there was a thundering sound, a great cry, and he fell. When he recovered his footing, the mouth of the shaft was gone, the scaffolding prostrate, the people around in horror and consternation. The pit had fallen in, and there were at least twenty men there, besides Lord St. Erme. Oh! how you will share that shuddering thankfulness and sorrow, that we felt, when Albert galloped up to the door and threw himself into the arm-chair, so unnerved by the shock that he could not at first speak. Happily his wife was here, so she heard all at once. He is gone with mamma and papa to tell the poor sister. Alas! though we think most of her, there are many other sufferers.

"*Three o'clock.* — Albert is come back. He says Lady Lucy met them in the hall, pale and trembling, as if she had already worked herself into an agony of fright. She begged them to tell her at once, and stood quite still, only now and then moaning to herself, "Oh, St. Erme! St. Erme!" Mamma took her by the hand, and tried to speak soothingly; but she did not seem to attend, and presently looked up, flushed and quivering, though she had been so still before, and declared that the whole might not have fallen; she had heard of people being dug out alive; they must begin at once, and she would go to the spot. There is no hope, Albert says; even if not crushed, they must have perished from the foul air; but the poor girl has caught fast hold of the idea, and insists on going to Coalworth at once to urge it on. They cannot prevent her, and mamma cannot

bear that she should be alone, and means to go with her. The carriage was ordered when Albert came here! Poor thing, there was never fonder love between a brother and sister; she hardly had a thought that did not centre in him. It breaks my heart to think how often we have seen them walking arm in arm together, and said they might be taken for a pair of lovers.

"*Five o'clock.* — Annette begs me to conclude her letter. My father has returned home, and fetched her to Coalworth, to be with my mother; and the poor young lady (already, I fear, Countess of St. Erme) who, he tells us, continues buoyed up by the delusion that her brother may yet be found alive, and is calling on all around to use the utmost exertions for his recovery. I regret that I cannot go in Annette's stead; but I cannot leave home in mamma's absence, as poor Louisa is much affected by Albert's peril, and in so nervons a state that she will not hear of my quitting her for a moment. We have indeed received a lesson, that no rank however exalted, can protect from the strokes of Providence, or the uncertainties of human life. But the postman calls. Adieu.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MATILDA MOSS."

(The last moral sentiment, be it observed, reached Miss Martindale, rendered illegible by scrawls of ink from Violet's hand.)

"Coalworth, August 21st.

"DEAREST VIOLET, — Matilda told you how I was sent for to come here. They are working on, — relays relieving each other day and night; but no one but poor Lady Lucy thinks there is any hope. Mr. Alder, the engineer, says Lord St. Erme must have been in the farthest gallery, and they cannot reach it in less than a week, so that if the other perils should be escaped, there would be starvation. The real number lost is fourteen, besides Lord St. Erme. It was a strange scene when I arrived at about seven o'clock yester-

day evening. The moor looking so quiet, and like itself, with the heath and furze glowing in the setting sun, as if they had no sympathy for us, till, when we came near the black heaps of coal, we saw the crowd standing round, — then getting into the midst, there was the great broken down piece of blackened soil and the black strong-armed men working away with that life-and-death earnestness. By the ruins of a shed that had been thrown down, there was a little group; — Lady Lucy, looking so fair and delicate, so unlike everything around, standing by an old woman in a red cloak, whom she had placed in the chair that had been brought for herself, the mother of one of the other sufferers. Mamma and papa were with her; but nothing seems to comfort her so much as going from one to the other of the women and children in the same trouble with herself. She talks to them, and tries to get them to be hopeful, and nurses the babies, and especially makes much of the old woman. The younger ones look cheered when she tells them that history which she dwells on so much, and seem as if they must believe her; but the poor old dame has no hope, and tells her so. "'T is the will of God, my lady, don't ye take on so now. It will be all one when we come to heaven, though I would have liked to have seen Willy again; but 't is the cross the Lord sends, so don't ye take on;" and then Lady Lucy sits down on the ground, and looks up in her face, as if her plain words did her more good than anything we can say, or even the clergyman, who is constantly going from one to the other. Whenever the men come to work, or go away, tired out, Lady Lucy thanks them from the bottom of her heart; and a look at her serves to inspirit and force them on to wonderful exertions. But alas! what it must end in! We are at the house that was Mr. Shoreham's, the nearest to the spot. It was hard work to get poor Lady Lucy to come in last night. She stood there till long after dark, when the stars were all out, and mamma could only get her away by telling her, that her brother would be vexed, and that, if she made herself ill,

she would not be able to nurse him. She did not sleep all night, and this morning she was out again with daylight, and we were obliged to bring her out some breakfast, which she shared with the fellow-sufferers round her, and would have taken nothing herself if the old dame had not coaxed her, and petted her, calling her "My pretty lady," and going back to her lecture on its being a sin to fret at His will. Mamma and I take turns to be with her. When I came in, she was sitting by the old woman, reading to her the Psalms, and the good old creature saying at the end of each, "Yes, yes, He knows what is good for them. Glory be to Him."

"*Aug. 22nd.* — As before. They have tried if they can open a way from the old shaft, but cannot do it with safety. Lady Lucy still the same, but paler and more worn; I think, less hopeful; I hope, more resigned.

"*Aug. 23rd.* — Poor Lucy was really tired out, and slept for two whole hours in the heat of noon, sitting on the ground by old Betty, fairly overpowered. It was a touching sight; the old woman watching her so sedulously, and all the rough people keeping such strict silence, and driving off all that could disturb her. The pitmen look at her with such compassionate reverence! The look and word she gives them are ten thousand times more to them, I am sure, than the high pay they get for every hour they work! Next Wednesday is the first day they can hope to come to anything. This waiting is dreadful. Would that I could call it suspense!

"*Aug. 24th, Sunday.* — She has been to church this morning. I did not think she could, but at the sound of the bell, she looked up, and the old woman, too; they seemed to understand each other without a word, and went together. The service was almost more than one could bear, but she was composed, except at the references in the sermon to our state of intense anxiety, and the need of submission. And at the special mention in the Litany of those in danger, I heard from beneath her hands clasped over her face, that

low moan of "O, brother, brother!" Still I think when the worst comes, she will bear it better and be supported.

"*Five o'clock.* — THERE IS HOPE! — O Violet! We went to church again this afternoon. The way leads past the old shaft. As we came by it in returning, Lady Lucy stood still, and said she heard a sound. We could hear nothing, but one of the wives said, "Yes, some one was working, and calling down there." I flew to the main shaft, and called Mr. Alder. He was incredulous, but Lady Lucy insisted. A man went down, and the sound was certain. No words can be made out. They are working, to meet them. Lucy burst into tears, and threw her arms round my neck as soon as she heard this man's report; but oh! thankful as we are, it is more cruel than ever not to know who is saved, and this letter must go to-night without waiting for more.

"25*th.* — He is alive, they say, but whether he can rally is most uncertain. All night they worked on, not till six o'clock this morning was any possibility of communication opened. Then questions were asked, "How many were there?" "Fifteen, all living, but one much crushed." Oh! the suspense, the heart-beating as those answers were sent up from the depths of the tomb — a living tomb indeed; and how Lady Lucy pressed the women's hard hands, and shed her tears of joy with them. But there was a damp to her gladness. Next message was that Lord St. Erme had fainted — they could not tell whether he lived — he could not hold out any longer! Then it was that she gave way, and indeed it was too agonizing, but the old woman seemed better able to calm her than we could. Terrible moments indeed! and in the midst there was sent up a folded paper that had been handed out at the small aperture on the point of a tool, when the poor things had first been able to see the lights of their rescuers. It was to Lady Lucy; her brother had written it on the leaf of a pocket-book, before their single lamp went out, and had given it in charge to one of the men when he found his strength failing. She was too dizzy and trembling to make out the pencil, and gave it to me to read to her. I

hope I am not doing wrong, for I must tell you how beautiful and resigned a farewell it was. He said, in case this note ever came to her, she must not grieve at the manner of his death — it was a comfort to him to be taken, while trying to repair the negligence of earlier years; they were a brave determined set of men who were with him, and she must provide for their widows and children. There was much fond thought for her, and things to console her, and one sentence you *must* have — "If ever you meet with the *hochbeseeltes Mädchen*, let her know that her knight thanks and blesses her in his last hour for having roused him and sent him forth to the battle field. I would rather be here now than what I was when she awoke me. Perhaps she will now be a friend and comforter to you."

"I think those were the words. I could not help writing them. Poor Lucy cried over the note, and we lowered down baskets of nourishment to be handed in, but we heard only of Lord St. Erme's continued swoon, and it was a weary while before the opening could be widened enough to help the sufferers out. They were exhausted, and could work no more on their side. But for him, it seems they would have done nothing; he was the only one who kept his presence of mind when the crash came. One lamp was not extinguished, and he made them at once consider, while the light lasted, whether they could help themselves. One of the hewers knew that they were not far from this old shaft, and happily Lord St. Erme had a little compass hung to his watch, which he used to carry in his wanderings abroad; this decided the direction, and he set them to work, and encouraged them to persevere most manfully. He did not work himself — indeed, the close air oppressed him much more than it did the pitmen, and he had little hope for his own life, however it might end; but he sat the whole time, supporting the head of the man who was hurt, and keeping up the resolution of the others, putting them in mind of the only hope in their dire distress, and guiding them to prayer and repentance, such as might fit them for life or death.

'He was more than ten preachers, and did more good than forty discourses,' said one man. But he had much less bodily strength than they, though more energy and fortitude, and he was scarcely sensible when the first hope of rescue came. It seemed as if he had just kept up to sustain them till then, and when they no longer depended on him for encouragement, he sank. The moment came at last. He was drawn up perfectly insensible, together with a great brawny-armed hewer, a vehement Chartist, and hitherto his great enemy, but who now held him in his arms like a baby, so tenderly and anxiously. As soon as he saw Lady Lucy, he called out, 'Here he is, Miss, I hope ye'll be able to bring him to. If all lords were like he now!' and then his wife had hold of him, quite beside herself with joy; but he shook her off with a sort of kind rudeness, and, exhausted as he was, would not hear of being helped to his home, till he had heard the doctors (who were all in waiting) say that Lord St. Erme was alive. Lady Lucy was hanging over him in a sort of agony of ecstasy, and yet of grief; but still she looked up, and put her little white hand into the collier's big black one, and said, 'Thank you,' and then he fairly burst out crying, and so his wife led him away. I saw Lord St. Erme for one moment, and never was anything more death-like, such ghastly white, except where grimed with coal-dust. They are in his room now, trying to restore animation. He has shown some degree of consciousness, and pressed his sister's hand, but all power of swallowing seems to be gone, and the doctors are in great alarm. The others are doing well — the people come in swarms to the door to ask for him.

"*26th.* — Comfort at last. He has been getting better all night, and this morning the doctors say all danger is over. Mamma says she can hardly keep from tears as she watches the happy placid looks of the brother and sister, as he lies there so pale and shadowy, and she hangs over him, as if she could never gaze at him enough. Several of the men, who were with him, came to inquire for him early this

morning; none of them suffered half so much as he did. I went down to speak to them, and I am glad I did; it is beautiful to see how he has won all their hearts, and to hear their appreciation of his conduct. They say he tended the man who was hurt, as if he had been his mother, and never uttered one word of complaint. 'He told us,' said one man, 'God could hear us out of the depth, as well as when we said our prayers in church; and whenever our hearts were failing us, there was his voice speaking somewhat good to cheer us up, or help us to mind that there was One who knew where we were, and would have a care for us and our wives and children.' 'Bless him,' said another, 'he has been the saving of our lives;' 'Bless him;' and they touched their hats and said Amen. I wish his sister could have seen them!

"*Five o'clock.* — Mrs. Delaval is come, and there is no room nor need for us, so we are going home. It is best, for mamma was nursing him all night, and is tired out. He has improved much in the course of the day, and they hope that he may soon be moved home. The pitmen want to carry him back on his matress on their shoulders. He has made himself king of their hearts! He has been able to inquire after them, and Lady Lucy, who forgets no one, has been downstairs to see the old Betty. 'Ah! my pretty lady,' she said, 'you are not sorry now that you tried to take the Lord's Cross patiently, and now, you see, your sorrow is turned into joy.' And then Lady Lucy would not have it called patience, and said she had had no submission in her, and Betty answered her, 'Ah! well, you are young yet, and He fits the burden to the shoulder.' How an adventure like this brings out the truth of every character, as one never would have known it otherwise. Who would have dreamt of that pattern of saintly resignation in the Coalworth heath, or that Lady Lucy Delaval would have found a poor old woman her truest and best comforter? and this without the least forwardness on the old woman's part.

"Just going! Lady Lucy so warm-hearted and grate-

ful — and Lord St. Erme himself wished mamma good bye in such a kind cordial manner, thanking her for all she had done for his sister. I am sorry to go, so as not to be in the way of seeing anything more of them, but it is time, for mamma is quite overcome. So I must close up this last letter from Coalworth, a far happier one than I thought to end with.

"Your most affectionate, "A. M.

"P.S. Is he not a hero, equal to his *hoch-beseeltes Mädchen*? I am ashamed of having written to you what was never meant for other eyes, but it will be safe with you. If you had seen how he used to waylay us, and ask for our tidings from you after the fire, you would see I cannot doubt who the *Mädchen* is. Is there no hope for him? The other affair was so long ago, and who could help longing to have such minstrel-love rewarded?"

That postscript did not go on to Brogden, though Annette's betrayal of confidence had been suffered to meet the eye of the high-souled maiden.

The accounts of Lord St. Erme continued to improve, though his recovery was but slow. To talk the adventure over was a never-failing interest to Lady Martindale, who, though Theodora suppressed Annette's quotation, was much of the opinion expressed in the postscript, and made some quiet lamentations that Theodora had rejected him.

"No, we were not fit for each other," she answered.

"You would not say so now," said Lady Martindale. "He has done things as great as yourself, my dear."

"I am fit for no one now," said Theodora, bluntly.

"Ah, my dear! — But I don't know why I should wish you to marry; I could never do without you."

"That 's the most sensible thing you have said yet, Mamma."

But Theodora wished herself less necessary at home, when, in a few weeks more, she had to gather that matters were going on well, from the large round-hand note, with

nursery spelling and folding, in which Johnnie announced that he had a little brother.

An interval of peace to Violet ensued. Arthur did not nurse her as in old times; but he was gentle and kind, and was the more with her as the cough, which had never been entirely removed, was renewed by a chill in the first cold of September. All went well till the babe was a week old, when Arthur suddenly announced his intention of asking for a fortnight's leave, as he was obliged to go to Boulogne on business.

Here was a fresh thunderbolt. Violet guessed that Mr. Gardner was there, and was convinced that, whatever might be Arthur's present designs, he would come back having taken a house at Boulogne. He answered her imploring look by telling her not to worry herself; he hoped to get "quit of the concern," and, at any rate, could not help going. She suggested that his cough would bear no liberties; he said, change of air would take it off, and scouted her entreaty that he would consult Mr. Harding. Another morning, a kind careless farewell, he was gone!

Poor Violet drew the coverlet over her head; her heart failed her, and she craved that her throbbing sinking weakness and feverish anxiety might bring her to her final rest. When she glanced over the future, her husband deteriorating, and his love closed up from her; her children led astray by evil influences of a foreign soil; Johnnie, perhaps, only saved by separation — Johnnie, her precious comforter; herself, far from every friend, every support, without security of church ordinances — all looked so utterly wretched that, as her pulses beat, and every sensation of illness was aggravated, she almost rejoiced in the danger she felt approaching.

Nothing but her infant's voice could have recalled her to a calmer mind, and brought back the sense that she was bound to earth by her children. She repented as of impatience and selfishness, called back her resolution, and sought for soothing. It came. She had taught herself the

dominion over her mind in which she had once been so deficient. Vexing cares and restless imaginings were driven back by echoes of hymns and psalms and faithful promises, as she lay calm and resigned, in her weakness and solitude, and her babe slept tranquilly in her bosom, and Johnnie brought his books and histories of his sisters; and she could smile in thankfulness at their loveliness of to-day, only in prayer concerning herself for the morrow.

She was content patiently to abide the Lord.

CHAPTER VIII.

But one, I wis, was not at home,
Another had paid his gold away,
Another called him thriftless loone,
And bade him sharply wend his way.
Heir of Lynne.

"He is done for. That wife of his may feel the consequence of meddling in other folk's concerns. Not that I care for that now, there's metal more attractive; but she has crossed me, and shall suffer for it." These short sentences met the ear of a broad-shouldered man in a rough coat, as, in elbowing his way through the crowd on the quay at Boulogne, he was detained for a moment behind two persons, whose very backs had all the aspect of the dissipated Englishman abroad. Struggling past, he gained a side view of the face of the speaker. It was one which he knew; but the vindictive glare in the sarcastic eyes positively made him start, as he heard the laugh of triumph and derision, in reply to some remark from the other.

"Ay! and got enough to get off to Paris, where the old Finch has dropped off his perch at last. That was all I wanted of him, and it was time to wring him dry and have done with him. He will go off in consumption before the year is out—"

As he spoke, the stranger turned on him an honest English face, the lips compressed into an expression of the utmost contempt, while indignation flashed in the pene-

trating gray eyes, that looked on him steadily. His bold defiant gaze fell, quailing and scowling; he seemed to become small, shrink away, and disappeared.

"When scamp number two looks round for scamp number one, he is lost in the crowd," muttered the traveller, half smiling; then, with a deep breath, "The hard-hearted rascal! If one conld only wring his neck! Heaven help the victim! though, no doubt, pity is wasted on him."

He ceased his reflections, to enter the steamer just starting for Folkestone, and was soon standing on deck, keeping guard over his luggage. The sound of a frequent cough attracted his attention, and, looking round, he saw a tall figure, wrapped in great coats, leaning on the leeward side of the funnel.

"Hollo! you here, Arthur! Where have you been?"

"What, Percy? How d'ye do?" replied a hoarse, languid voice.

"Is Mrs. Martindale here?"

"No." He was cut short by such violent cough that he was obliged to rest his forehead on his arm; then shivering and complaining of the cold, he said he should go below, and moved away, rejecting Percy's offered arm with some impatience.

The weather was beautiful, and Percy stood for some time watching the receding shore, and scanning, with his wonted keen gaze, the various countenances of the passengers. He took a book from his pocket, but did not read long; he looked out on the sea, and muttered to himself, "What folly now? Why won't that name let one rest? Besides, he looked desperately ill; I must go and see if they have made him comfortable in that dog-hole below."

Percy shook himself as if he was out of humour; and, with his hands in his pockets, and a sauntering step, entered the cabin. He found Arthur there alone, his head resting on his arms, and his frame shaken by the suppressed cough.

"You seem to have a terrible cold! This is a bad time to be crossing. How long have you been abroad?"

"Ten days. — How came you here?"

"I am going to Worthbourne. How are all your folks?"

"All well;" and coughing again, he filled up a tumbler with spirits and water, and drank it off, while Percy exclaimed:

"Are you running crazy, to be feeding such a cough in this way?"

"The only thing to warm one," said he, shuddering from head to foot.

"Yes, warm you properly into a nice little fever and inflammation. Why, what a hand you have! And your pulse! Here, lie down at once," as he formed a couch with the help of a wrapper and bag. Arthur passively accepted his care; but as the chill again crept through his veins, he stretched out his hand for the cordial.

"I won't have it done!" thundered Percy. "I will not look on and see you killing yourself!"

"I wish I could," murmured Arthur, letting his hand drop, as if unequal to contest the point.

The conviction suddenly flashed on Percy that he was the victim! "You have got yourself into a scrape," he said.

"Scrape! I tell you I am ruined! undone!" exclaimed Arthur, rearing himself up, as he burst out into passionate imprecations on Mark Gardner, cut short by coughing.

"You! with your wife and little children entirely depending on you! You have allowed that scoundrel, whose baseness you knew, to dupe you to your own destruction!" said Percy, with slowness and severity.

Too ill and wretched to resent the reproach, Arthur sank his head with a heavy groan that almost disarmed Percy; then looking up, with sparkling eyes, he exclaimed, "No! I did not know his baseness; I thought him a careless 'scape-grace, but not much worse than he has made me. I would as soon have believed myself capable of the treachery, the unfeeling revenge —" Again he was unable to say more, and struggling for utterance, he stamped his foot against the floor, and groaned aloud with rage and pain.

Percy persuaded him to lie down again, and could not refrain from forcible expressions of indignation, as he recollected the sneering exultation of Gardner's tone of triumph over one so open-hearted and confiding.

It was a moment when sympathy unlocked the heart, and shame was lost in the sense of injury. Nothing more was needed to call from Arthur the history of his wrongs, as well as he was able to tell it, eking out with his papers the incoherent sentences which he was unable to finish, so that Percy succeeded in collecting, from his broken narration, an idea of the state of affairs.

The horses, kept jointly at his expense and that of Gardner, had been the occasion of serious debts; and on Gardner's leaving England, there had been a pressure on Colonel Martindale that rendered him anxious to free himself, even at the cost of his commission. Gardner, on the other hand, had, it appeared, been desirous to have him at Boulogne, perhaps, at first, merely as a means of subsistence during the year of probation, and on the failure of the first attempt at bringing him thither, had written to invite him, holding out as an inducement, that he was himself desirous of being disembarrassed, in order that Miss Brandon might find him clear of this entanglement, and representing that he had still property enough to clear off his portion of the liability.

With this view Arthur had gone out to Boulogne to meet him, but had found him dilatory in entering on business, and was drawn into taking part in the amusements of the place; living in a state of fevered excitement, which aggravated his indisposition and confused his perceptions, so that he fell more completely than ever into the power of his false friend, and was argued into relinquishing his project of selling the horses, and into taking up larger sums for keeping them on. In fact, the sensation that a severe cold was impending, and disgust at the notion of being laid up in such company, rendered him doubly facile; and, in restless impatience to get away and avoid discussion, he acceded to everything,

and signed whatever Gardner pleased. Not till he was on the point of embarking, after having gambled away most of his ready money, did he discover that the property of which he had heard so much was only a shadow, which had served to delude many another creditor; and that they had made themselves responsible for a monstrous amount, for which he was left alone to answer, while the first demand would be the signal for a multitude of other claims. As they parted, Gardner had finally thrown off the mask, and let him know that this was the recompense of his wife's stories to the Brandons. She might say what she pleased now, it mattered not; Mark was on his way to the rich widow of Mr. Finch, and had wanted nothing of Arthur but to obtain the means of going to her, and to be revenged on him.

So Arthur half expressed, and his friend understood. Save for his bodily condition, Percy could hardly have borne with him. His reckless self-indulgence and blind folly deserved to be left to reap their own fruit; yet, when he beheld their victim, miserable, prostrated by illness and despair, and cast aside with scornful cruelty, he could not, without being as cold-hearted as Gardner himself, refrain from kind words and suggestions of consolation. "Might not his father assist him?"

"He cannot if he would. Everything is entailed, and you know how my aunt served us. There is no ready money to be had, not even the five thousand pounds that is the whole dependence for the poor things at home in case of my death, which may come soon enough for aught I care. I wish it was! I wish we were all going to the bottom together, and I was to see none of their faces again. It would be better for Violet than this."

Percy could say little; but, though blunt of speech, he was tender of heart. He did all in his power for Arthur's comfort, and when he helped him on shore at Folkestone, recommended him to go to bed at once, and offered to fetch Mrs. Martindale.

"She cannot come," sighed Arthur; "she has only been confined three weeks."

More shame for you, had Percy almost said; but he no longer opposed Arthur's homeward instinct, and, finding a train ready to start, left their luggage to its fate, and resolved not to lose sight of him till he was safely deposited at his own house. Such care was in truth needed; the journey was a dreadful one, the suffering increased every hour; and when at length, in the dusk of the evening, they arrived in Cadogan-place, he could hardly mount the stairs, even with Percy's assistance.

It was the first time that Violet had left her chamber; and, as the drawing-room door opened, she was seen sitting, pale and delicate, in her low chair by the fire, her babe on her lap, and the other three at her feet, Johnnie presiding over his sisters, as they looked at a book of prints.

She started up in alarm as Arthur entered, leaning on Mr. Fotheringham, and at once seized by a paroxysm of severe cough. Percy tried to assume a re-assuring tone. "Here, you see, I have brought him home with one of his bad colds. He will speak for himself presently."

In a second she had placed the infant on the sofa, signed to Johnnie to watch him, and drawn the arm-chair to the fire. Arthur sank into it, throwing his arm round her for support, and resting his weary head against her, as if he had found his refuge. Percy relieved her from the two little girls, unclasping their frightened grasp on her dress so gently and firmly, that, stranger though he was, Anna did not cry on being taken in his arms; nor Helen resist his leading her out of the room, and desiring her to take her sister up-stairs and to call their nurse.

Returning, he found that necessity had brought strength and presence of mind to their mother. She did not even tremble, though Arthur's only words were, "We are undone. If I die, forgive me." Indeed, she hardly took in the sense of what he said; she only caressed and tried to re-

lieve him, assisted by Percy, who did not leave them till he had seen Arthur safely in charge of Mr. Harding.

He then walked away to his old lodgings in Piccadilly, where he was recognized with ecstasy by the quondam ragged-school boy, and was gladly welcomed by his landlady, who could not rejoice enough at the sight of his good-humoured face.

He divided his time between friendly gossip on her family affairs as she bustled in and out, in civility to the cat, and in railing at himself for thinking twice of such a selfish ne'er-do-weel as Arthur Martindale. The image of that pale young mother and her little ones pursued him, and with it the thought of the complicated distresses awaiting her; the knowledge of the debts that would almost beggar her, coming in the midst of her husband's dangerous illness.

Percy muttered to himself lines of "Who comes here — a Grenadier," made a face, stretched himself, and called on himself to look on reasonableness and justice. Arthur deserved no favour, because he had encumbered himself with a helpless family, and then cruelly disregarded them.

"What does a man deserve who leaves his wife with a child of a week old, to run after a swindler in foreign parts — eh, puss?" said he aloud, viciously tweaking the old cat's whiskers; then, as she shook her ears and drew back, too dignified to be offended, "Ay, ay, while wheat and tares grow together, the innocent must suffer for the guilty. The better for both. One is refined, the other softened. I am the innocent sufferer now," added he; "condole with me, pussy! That essay would have been worth eighty pounds if it was worth a sixpence; and there's a loss for a striving young man! I cannot go on to Worthbourne without recovering it; and who knows how Jane will interpret my delay? While I live, I'll never carry another manuscript anywhere but in my pocket, and then we should all go to the bottom together, according to poor Arthur's friendly wish. Ha! that's not it sticking out of my great-coat pocket? No such good luck — only those absurd papers of poor Arthur's.

I remember I loaded my coat on him when we were going to land. What a business it is! Let us overhaul them a bit."

He became absorbed in the contemplation, only now and then giving vent to some vituperative epithet, till he suddenly dashed his hand on the table with a force that startled the cat from her doze.

"Never mind, puss; you know of old

I care for nobody, and nobody cares for me.

So now, good night, and there 's an end of the matter."

The first thing he did, next morning, was to walk to Cadogan-place, to return the papers. He had long to wait before the door was opened; and when James at length came, it was almost crying that he said that Colonel Martindale was very ill; he had ruptured a blood-vessel that morning, and was in the most imminent danger.

Mr. Fotheringham could see no one — could not be of any service. He walked across the street, looked up at the windows, mused, then exclaimed, "That being the case, I had better go at once to Folkestone, and rescue my bag from the jaws of the Custom-house."

CHAPTER IX.

She left the gleam-lit fire-place,
She came to the bedside,
Her look was like a sad embrace,
The gaze of one who can divine
A grief, and sympathize.
Sweet flower, thy children's eyes
Are not more innocent than thine.
Tristram and Yseulte. — M. ARNOLD.

AT last there was a respite. The choking, stifling flow of blood, that, with brief intervals, had for the last two hours threatened momentary death, had been at length checked; the eyes were closed that had roamed in helpless affright and agony from Violet to the doctors; and the sufferer was lying, in what his wife would fain have deemed a slumber, but the gasping respiration and looks of distress made it but too evident that it was the stillness of exhaustion,

enhanced by dread of renewing the bleeding by word or motion.

There could be no concealment of the exceeding danger. His lungs had never been strong; and the slight cough, which, contrary to his usual habits, he had neglected all the summer, had been the token of mischief, which his recent expedition had aggravated to a fearful extent. Even the violent bleeding had not relieved the inflammation on the chest, and Violet had collected from the physician's looks and words that it could be hardly expected that he should survive the day.

Yet, through that dreadful morning, she had not failed in resolution or composure: never once had her husband seen in her look, or heard in her tone, aught but what might cheer and sustain him — never had her fortitude or steadiness given way. She had not time to think of consolation and support; but her habit of prayer and trust came to her aid, and brought strength and support around her "in these great waterfloods" of trouble. She was not forsaken in her hour of need. Hitherto there had been no space for reflection; now his quiescent state, though for the present so great a relief, brought the opportunity of realizing his situation; but therewith arose thankfulness for the space thus granted, and the power of praying that it might be blessed to him, whether for life or death.

In watchfulness and supplication, she sat beside him, with her babe, much afraid that it should disturb him, and be unwelcome. However, when some little sound made him aware of its presence, he opened his eyes, moved his hand, as if to put back the covering that hid its face from him, and presently signed to have it placed on the bed by his side. It was a fine large dark boy, already so like him as to make the contrast the more striking and painful, between the unconscious serenity of the babe and the restless misery of the face of the father, laid low in the strength of manhood, and with a look of wretched uneasiness, as if the load on the mind was a worse torment than the weight on the labouring

breath. He, who usually hardly deigned a glance at his infants, now lay gazing with inexpressible softness and sadness at the little sleeping face; and Violet, while gratified by that look of affection, could not help having it the more borne in on her mind, that death must be very near. Were the well-springs of love, so long closed up, only opening when he was about to leave his children for ever? If she could only have heard him speak!

Presently, as if there was some sting of reproach in the impassive features, he turned his head away abruptly, with a deep groan, and hid his face. She took away the child, and there was another silence, which she ventured to break, now and then, by a few sentences of faith and prayer, but without being able to perceive whether he attended. Suddenly he started, as if thrilled in every vein, and glanced around with terrified anxiety, of which she could not at first perceive the cause, till she found it was the postman's knock. He held out his hand for the letters, and cast a hurried look at their directions. None were for him, but there was one in his sister's handwriting. Violet did not feel herself able to read it, and was laying it aside, when she saw his looks following it. Her present world was so entirely in that room that she had forgotten all beyond; and it only now occurred to her to say, "Your father? Do you wish for him? I will write."

"Telegraph." Even this whisper brought back the cough, that was anguish and terror.

It was already so late in the day, that though thus summoned, there was no chance of Lord Martindale's arriving till the following evening; and Violet's heart sank at reckoning up the space that must elapse, more especially when she saw the perturbed eye, — the startings at each sound, — the determination to know the business of every one who came to speak to her; evident indications that there was some anxiety on his mind which she could not comprehend.

Thus passed the day, — between visits from desponding

doctors, and vain measures for reducing the inflammation. At night, Mr. Harding would have prevailed on her to go to rest, promising to keep watch in her stead, but she only shook her head, and said, she could not. She had not seen, and had scarcely thought of, the elder children all day; but at about eleven o'clock at night, she was startled by a sound of lamentable crying, Johnnie's voice in the nursery. The poor little boy's nerves had been so much shaken by the fire at Martindale, that he had become subject to night alarms, which sometimes showed their effect for the whole subsequent day; and his mother stole away on hearing his cry, leaving Arthur in Mr. Harding's charge, and hoping not to be missed.

Sarah was standing over Johnnie, half-coaxing, half-scolding, while he sat up in his little crib, shivering and sobbing, with chattering teeth, and terrified exclamations, about papa all over blood, lying dead under the burning windows.

"There now, you have brought your poor mamma up!" said Sarah, indignantly.

"Mamma! Mamma!" and the cold trembling little creature clasped itself upon her neck and bosom, still repeating the dreadful words. She carried him to the fire, warmed him on her lap, caressed and soothed him, as his understanding awoke, telling him that papa was safe in his own room,— he was ill, very ill, and Johnnie must pray for him; but oh! he was alive, safe in his own bed. But as Johnnie nestled to her, repeating, "Say it again, Mamma, I was so frightened! I can't get it out of my head. Oh! is papa safe?" there would come the thought that with morning the child might have to hear that he was fatherless.

This dread, and the desire to efface the impression of the terrible dream, induced her, when he had obediently struggled for composure, to tell him that, on condition of perfect stillness, he might come down with her, and have a little glimpse of papa. Wrapping him up, she took him in by the open dressing-room door, to which Arthur's back was

turned, trusting to escape observation; but nothing eluded those fever-lighted eyes, and they instantly fell upon the little trembling figure, the quivering face and earnest gaze.

"I hope we have not disturbed you," apologized Violet; "we hoped you would not hear us. Poor Johnnie woke up crying so much at your being ill, that I ventured to bring him to have one look at you, for fear he should not go to sleep again."

She need not have feared. Even while she spoke, Arthur held out his hands, with a countenance that caused Johnnie, with a stifled exclamation of "Papa! Papa!" to spring on the bed, and there he lay folded closely to his father's breast.

It was but for a moment. Violet had to lift the child hastily away, to be carried off by Sarah, that he might not witness the terrible suffering caused by the exertion and emotion; and yet, when this was passed, she could not repent of what she had done, for one great grief had thus been spared to herself and her boy.

She knew that to discover his son's ardent affection must be a poignant reproach for his neglect and jealousy, and she grieved at once for him and with him; but she could not understand half the feelings of bitter anguish that she perceived in his countenance and gestures. She did not know of his expectation that each ring at the bell might bring the creditors' claims to heap disgrace upon him, nor how painful were the thoughts of her and of the children, totally unprovided for, without claim during his father's life-time, even on his own scanty portion as a younger son. He could only cast them on the mercy of his father and brother; and what right had he to expect anything from them, after his abuse of their kindness and forbearance? He thought of his neglect of his patient, devoted wife, whom he was leaving, with her little ones, to struggle with poverty and dependence, — he thought of his children growing up to know him only as the improvident selfish father, who had doomed them to difficulties, and without one tender word or kind look to grace his

memory. No wonder he turned, unable to brook the sight of his unconscious babe; and that, when with morning, little steps and voices sounded above, such a look of misery came over his face, that Violet hastened to order the children down to the dining-room, out of hearing.

Ere long, however, from the other room, appropriated to the baby, a face peeped in, and Johnnie sprang to her side with earnest whispers; "Mamma, may I not say my prayers with you? I will not wake papa, but I can't bear it without." and the tears were in his eyes.

Violet's glance convinced her that this would be anything but disturbing, and she consented. Johnnie thought his father asleep; but she saw him watching the boy, as he stood with clasped hands, and eyes in fixed steadfast gaze, repeating the Creed, so gravely and distinctly, that not one of the whispering accents was lost. Looking upwards, as if pursuing some thought far away, Johnnie said, "Amen;" and then knelt, breathing forth his innocent petitions, with their mention of father, mother, sisters, and little brother; and therewith a large tear-drop gathered in the eyes fixed on him; but she would not seem to notice, and bent her head over the boy, who, when his daily form was finished, knelt on, and pressed her arm. "Mamma," he whispered, very low indeed, "may I say something for papa?" and on her assent, "O God! make dear, dear papa better, if it be Thy heavenly will, and let it be Thy heavenly will."

Arthur's face was hidden; she only saw his fingers holding up the covering with a quivering grasp. Johnnie rose up quite simply, and letting him continue in the belief that his father slept, she allowed him to go noiselessly away; after she had held him fast in her arms, able to feel, even now, the comfort and blessing of her child.

Some little time had passed before Arthur looked up; then gazing round, as if seeking something, he said, "Where is he?"

"Johnnie? He is gone, he did not know you were awake. Shall I send for him?"

"For all."

They came; but he was made to feel that he had disregarded them too long. They had never been familiarized with him; seldom saw him, and were kept under restraint in his presence; and there was no intimacy to counteract the fright inspired by his present appearance. Ghastly pale, with a hectic spot on each cheek, with eyes unnaturally bright and dilated, and a quantity of black hair and whiskers, he was, indeed, a formidable object to the little girls; and Violet was more grieved than surprised when Annie screamed with affright, and had to be carried away instantly; and Helen backed, with her hands behind her, resisting all entreaties and remonstrance, and unheeding his outstretched hand. The child was of so determined and wilful a nature, that Violet dreaded an outbreak if she were too much pressed, and was forced to let her go; though much grieved, both for the distress that it gave Arthur, and for the thought of how his daughter might remember it by and by.

They supposed that Johnnie had gone with his sisters, but at the end of half an hour, became aware that he had ever since been standing, almost hidden by the curtain, satisfied with merely being in the room. The fair face, so delicately tinted, the dark shady eyes, lovingly and pensively fixed on his father, and the expression half mournful, half awe-struck, were a touching sight in so young a child, and Arthur seemed so to feel it. He signed to him to come near, and with a flush, between joy and fear, the little boy was instantly at his side. One hot hand enfolded the small soft cool one, the other pressed fondly on the light silken waves of hair. After thus holding him for some moments, he tried to speak, in whispering breathless gasps of a word at a time.

"You'll comfort her!" and he looked towards his mother. "You 'll take care of the others — will you?"

"If I can. God takes care of us," said Johnny, wistfully, as if striving to understand, as he felt the pressure

redoubled on hand and head, as if to burn in what was uttered with such difficulty and danger.

"Tell your grandfather I trust you all to him. He must forgive. Say so to him. You'll be a better son to him than I. When you know all, don't remember it against me."

He could say no more—it had brought on a fit of coughing and breathlessness, through which he scarcely struggled. Silence was more than ever enforced, but throughout the day the oppression was on the increase, especially towards the evening, when he became excited by the expectation of his father's arrival. He sat, pillowed high up, each respiration an effort that spread a burning crimson over his face, while eye and ear were nervously alert.

"Arthur is very ill, and begs to see you," was the telegraphic message that filled the cottage at Brogden with consternation. Lady Martindale was too unwell to leave home, but Theodora was thankful to her father for deciding that her presence was necessary for Violet's sake; indeed, as they travelled in doubt and suspense, and she was continually reminded of that hurried journey when her unchastened temper had been the torment of herself and of her brother, she felt it an undeserved privilege to be allowed to go to him at all. Instead of schemes of being important, there was a crushing sense of an impending blow; she hardly had the power to think or speculate in what form or how heavily it might fall. She had only room for anxiety to get forward.

They arrived; she hurried up the stairs, only catching James's words declaring his master no better.

She saw in the twilight a slight bending form, coming down, holding by the balusters. Violet was in her arms, clasping her with a trembling, almost convulsive tightness, without speaking.

"O, Violet, what is it? Is he so very ill?"

Lord Martindale hastened up at the same moment, and Violet recovering, in a few words, spoken very low, but clearly, told of his condition, adding, "He has been watching

for you all this time; he heard you come, and wants you directly, but don't let him speak."

She hung on Theodora's arm, and guided them up, as if hardly able to stand. She opened the outer room door, and there (while the nurse had taken her place) sat Johnnie on the rug, with the baby lying across his lap, and his arms clasped tenderly round it. It was restless, and he looked up to his mother, who bent down and took it in her arms, while Lord Martindale passed on. Theodora stood appalled and overawed. This was beyond even her fears.

"Thank you for coming," said Violet, who had sunk into a chair.

"O, Violet, when? — how? —"

But a look of horror came over Violet; she started up, almost threw the infant into Theodora's arms, and vanished into the other room. "Oh! what is it? What is the matter?" exclaimed Theodora.

"The cough, the blood," said Johnnie, in a low voice; and turning away with a suppressed sob he threw himself down, and hid his face on a chair. She was in an agony to pass that closed door, but the baby was fretting and kept her prisoner.

After some minutes had thus passed, her father appeared, and would have gone on without seeing her, but she detained him by an imploring cry and grasp, and entreated to hear what had happened.

"The blood-vessel again — I must send for Harding."

"Shall I tell James to go?" inquired a little quiet voice, as Johnnie lifted up his flushed face.

"Do so, my dear;" and, as the little boy left the room, his grandfather added, with the calmness of hopelessness, "Poor child! it is of no use, it must soon be over now;" and he was returning, when Theodora again held him fast — "Papa! Papa! I must see him, let me come!"

"Not yet," said her father; "the sight of a fresh person might hasten it. If there is any chance, we must do nothing hazardous. I will call you when they give up hope."

Theodora was forced to relinquish her hold, for the baby screamed outright, and required all her efforts to hush its cries that they might not add fresh distress to the sick room. It seemed to make her own misery of suspense beyond measure unendurable, to be obliged to control herself so as to quiet the little creature by gentle movements, and to have its ever-renewed wailings filling her ears, when her whole soul hung on the sounds she could catch from the inner room. No one came to relieve her; only Johnnie returned, listened for a moment at the door, and dropped into his former position, and presently Mr. Harding passed rapidly through the room.

Long, long she waited ere the door once more opened. Her father came forth. Was it the summons? But he stopped her move towards the room. "Not yet; the bleeding is checked."

Then as Mr. Harding followed, they went out of the room in consultation, and almost the next moment Violet herself glided in, touched Johnnie's head, and said, "Papa is better, darling;" then took the baby from Theodora, saying, "Thank you, you shall see him soon;" she was again gone, Johnnie creeping after, whither Theodora would have given worlds to follow.

After another interval, he returned with a message that mamma begged aunt Theodora to be so kind as to go and make tea for grandpapa; she thought dear papa was breathing a little more easily, but he must be quite quiet now.

Obeying the sentence of banishment, she found her father sending off a hasty express to give more positive information at home. "We must leave them to themselves a little while," he said. "There must be no excitement till he has had time to rally. I thought he had better not see me at first."

"Is he worse than John has been?"

"Far worse. I never saw John in this immediate danger."

"Did this attack begin directly after you came?"

"It was the effort of speaking. He *would* try to say something about racing debts — Gardner, papers in his coat pocket, and there broke down, coughed, and the bleeding came on. There is something on his mind, poor —"

Theodora made a sign to remind him of Johnnie's presence; but the child came forward. "Grandpapa, he told me to tell you something," and, with eyes bent on the ground, the little fellow repeated the words like a lesson by rote.

Lord Martindale was much overcome; he took his grandson on his knee, and pressed him to his breast without being able to speak; then, as if to recover composure by proceeding to business, he sent him to ask James for the coat last worn by his papa, and bring the papers in the pocket. Then with more agitation he continued, "Yes, yes, that was what poor Arthur's eyes were saying all the time. I could only promise to settle everything and take care of her; and there was she, poor thing, with a face like a martyr, supporting his head, never giving way, speaking now and then so calmly and soothingly, when I could not have said a word. I do believe she is almost an angel!" said Lord Martindale, with a burst of strong emotion. "Take care of her! She will not want that long! at this rate. Harding tells me he is very anxious about her: she is not by any means recovered, yet he was forced to let her sit up all last night, and she has been on her feet this whole day! What is to become of her and these poor children? It is enough to break one's heart!"

Here Johnnie came back. "Grandpapa, we cannot find any papers. James has looked in all the clothes papa wore when he came home, and he did not bring home his portmanteau."

"Come home! Where had he been!"

"I don't know. He was away a long time."

Lord Martindale started, and repeated the words in amaze. Theodora better judged of a child's "long time," and asked whether it meant a day or a week. "Was it since the baby was born that he went?"

"Baby was a week old. He was gone one — two Sundays,

and he came back all on a sudden the day before yesterday, coughing so much that he could not speak, and the gentleman told mamma all about it."

"What gentleman, Johnnie? Was it Mr. Gardner?"

"O no; this was a good-natured gentleman."

"Mr. Herries, or Captain Fitzhugh?

"No, it was a long name, and some one I never saw before; but I think it was the man that belongs to the owl."

"What can the child mean?" asked Lord Martindale.

Johnnie mounted a chair, and embraced his little stuffed owl.

"The man that gave me this."

"Percy's Athenian owl!" cried Theodora.

"Was Fotheringham the name?" said Lord Martindale.

"Yes, it was the name like aunt Helen's," said Johnnie.

"Has he been here since?"

"He called to inquire yesterday morning. I am not sure," said the exact little boy, "but I think he said he met papa in the steamer."

It seemed mystery on mystery, and James could only confirm his young master's statement. After the little boy had answered all the questions in his power he slid down from his grandfather's knee, saying that it was bed-time, and wished them good night in a grave, sorrowful, yet childlike manner, that went to their hearts. He returned, in a short time, with a message that mamma thought papa a little better, and ready to see them. Theodora went up first; Johnnie led her to the door, and then went away, while Violet said, almost inaudibly, "Here is Theodora come to see you."

Prepared as Theodora was, she was startled by the bloodlessness of the face, and the hand that lay without movement on the coverlet, while the gaze of the great black eyes met her with an almost spectral effect; and the stillness was only broken by the painful heaving of the chest, which seemed to shake even the bed-curtains. But for Violet's looks and gesture, Theodora would not have dared to go

up to him, take his hand, and, on finding it feebly return her pressure, bend over and kiss his forehead.

"His breath is certainly relieved, and there is less fever," repeated Violet; but to Theodora this seemed to make it only more shocking. If this was better, what must it not have been? Her tongue positively refused to speak, and she only stood looking from her brother to his wife, who reclined, sunk back in her chair beside him, looking utterly spent and worn out, her cheeks perfectly white, her eyes half closed, her whole frame as if all strength and energy were gone. That terrible hour had completely exhausted her powers; and when Theodora had recollected herself, and summoned Lord Martindale, who undertook the night watch, Violet had not voice to speak; she only hoarsely whispered a few directions, and gave a sickly submissive smile as her thanks.

For one moment she revived, as she smoothed Arthur's bed, moistened his lips, and pressed her face to his; then she allowed Theodora almost to lift her away, and support her into the next room where Sarah was waiting. Even thought and anxiety seemed to be gone; she sat where they placed her, and when they began to undress her, put up her hand mechanically to her dress, missed the fastening, and let it drop with a vacant smile that almost overcame Theodora. They laid her in bed, and she dropped asleep, like an infant, the instant her head was on the pillow. Theodora thought it cruel to rouse her to take nourishment; but Sarah was peremptory, and vigorously administered the spoonfuls, which she swallowed in the same unconscious manner. She was only roused a little by a sound from the baby: "Give him to me, he will be quieter so;" and as Sarah held him to her, she took him in her arms, and was instantly sunk in the same dead slumber.

"My pretty lamb!" mourned the cold stern servant, as she arranged her coverings; "this is the sorest brash we have had together yet, and I doubt whether ye 'll win through with it. May He temper the blast that sends it."

Gazing at her for a few seconds, she raised her hand to dry some large tears; and as if only now conscious of Miss Martindale's presence, curtsied, saying, in her usual manner: "I beg your pardon, Ma'am. There is the room next the nursery made ready for you."

"I could not go, Sarah, thank you. Go to your children; I will take care of her. Pray go."

"I will, thank you, Ma'am. We will have need of all our strength before we have done."

"How has she been before this?"

"About as well as usual at first, Ma'am, till he threw her back with going off into they foreign parts, where he has been and as good as catched his death, and would have died if Mr. Fotheringham had not brought him home."

"What! has he been abroad, Sarah?"

"Yes, Ma'am. I was holding the baby when he says to Missus he was going to Bully, or Boulong —"

"Boulogne —"

"Yes, Bullying, or some such place; and bullied him they have; stripped him even of his very portmanteau, with his eight new shirts in it, that they have! Well, Missus, she says his cold would be worse, and he said it only wanted a change, and she need never fret, for he meant to get quit of the whole concern. But for that, I would have up and told him he didn't ought to go, and that he must stay at home and mind her; but then I thought, if he did get rid of them nasty horses, and that there Mr. Gardner, with his great nasturtions on his face, it would be a blessed day. But I ought to have known how it would be: he is too innocent for them; and they have never been content till they have been and got his very clothes, and given him his death, and broke the heart of the bestest and most loving-heartedest lady as ever lived. That they have!"

Having eased her mind by this tirade, Sarah mended the fire, put every comfort in Miss Martindale's reach, advised her to lie down by her mistress, and walked off.

Theodora felt giddy and confounded with the shocks

of that day. It was not till she had stretched herself beside Violet that she could collect her perceptions of the state of affairs; and oh! what wretchedness! Her darling brother, round whom the old passionate ardour of affection now clung again, lying at death's door; his wife sinking under her exertions; — these were the least of the sorrows, though each cough seemed to rend her heart, and that sleeping mother was like a part of her life. The misery was in that mystery — nay, in the certainty, that up to the last moment of health, Arthur had been engaged in his reckless, selfish courses! If he were repentant, there was neither space nor power to express it, far less for reparation. He was snatched at once from thoughtless pleasure and disregard of religion — nay, even of the common charities of home! And to fasten the guilt to herself were those few half-uttered words — races, debts, Gardner!

"If you once loosen the tie of home, he will go back to courses and companions that have done him harm enough already." "Beware of Mark Gardner!" "Whatever comes of these races, it is your doing, not mine." Those warnings flashed before her eyes like letters of fire, and she turned her face to the pillow as it were to hide from them, as well as to stifle the groans that could not have been wrung from her by bodily pain. "Oh, my sin has found me out! I thought I had been punished, but these are the very dregs! His blood is on my head! My brother! my brother! whom I loved above all! He was learning to love his home and children; she was weaning him from those pursuits! What might he not have been? I led him away! When he shrank from the temptation, I dragged him to it! I gave him back to the tempter! I, who thought I loved him — I did the devil's work! Oh! this is the heavier weight! Why should it crush others with the only guilty one? Oh! have mercy, have mercy on him! Let me bear all! Take me instead! Let me not have slain his soul!"

It was anguish beyond the power of words. She could not lie still; she knelt on the floor, and there the flood of

despair fell on her more overwhelmingly; and crouching, almost cast on the ground, she poured out incoherent entreaties for mercy, for space for his repentance, for his forgiveness. That agony of distracted prayer must have lasted a long time. Some sound in her brother's room alarmed her, and in starting she shook the table. Her father came to ask if anything was the matter; told her that Arthur was quiet, and begged her to lie down. It was a relief to have something to obey, and she moved back. The light gleamed on something bright. It was the setting of Helen's cross! "Ah! I was not worthy to save it; that was for Johnnie's innocent hand! I may not call this my cross, but my rod!" Then came one thought: "I came not for the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance." Therewith hot tears rose up. "With Him there is infinite mercy and redemption." Some power of hope revived, that Mercy might give time to repent, accept the heartfelt grief that might exist, though not manifested to man! The hope, the motive, and comfort in praying, had gleamed across her again; and not with utter despair could she beseech that the sins she had almost caused might be so repented of as to receive the pardon sufficient for all iniquity.

CHAPTER X.

Thus have I seen a temper wild
In yokes of strong affection bound
Unto a spirit meek and mild,
Till chains of good were on him found.
He, struggling in his deep distress,
As in some dream of loneliness,
Hath found it was an angel guest.
Thoughts in Past Years.

Five days had passed, and no material change had taken place. There was no serious recurrence of bleeding, but the inflammation did not abate, and the suffering was grievous, though Arthur was so much enfeebled that he could not struggle under it. His extreme debility made his body passive, but it was painfully evident that his mind was

as anxious and ill at ease as ever. There was the same distrustful watch to see every letter, and know all that passed; the constant strain of every faculty, all in absolute silence, so that his nurses, especially Theodora, felt as if it would be a positive personal relief to them if those eyes would be closed for one minute.

What would they have given to know what passed in that sleepless mind? But anything that could lead to speaking or agitation was forbidden; even, to the great grief of Theodora, the admission of the clergyman of the parish. Lord Martindale agreed with the doctors that it was too great a risk, and Violet allowed them to decide, whispering to Theodora that she thought he heeded Johnnie's prayers more than anything read with a direct view to himself. The cause of his anxiety remained in doubt. Lord Martindale had consulted Violet, but she knew nothing of any papers. She was aware that his accounts were mixed up with Mr. Gardner's, and believed he had gone to Boulogne to settle them; and she conjectured that he had found himself more deeply involved than he had expected. She remembered his having said something of being undone, and his words to Johnnie seemed to bear the same interpretation.

Mr. Fotheringham's apparition was also a mystery; so strange was it that, after bringing Arthur home in such a state, he should offer no further assistance. James was desired to ask him to come in, if he should call to inquire; but he did not appear, and the father and sister began to have vague apprehensions, which they would not for the world have avowed to each other, that there must be worse than folly, for what save disgrace would have kept Percy from aiding John's brother in his distress? Each morning rose on them with dread of what the day might bring forth, not merely from the disease within, but from the world without; each postman's knock was listened to with alarm, caught from poor Arthur.

His wife was of course spared much of this. That worst fear could not occur to her: she had no room for any thought

but for him as he was in the sight of Heaven, and each hour that his life was prolonged was to her a boon and a blessing. She trusted that there was true sorrow for the past — not merely dread of the consequences, as she traced the shades upon his face, while he listened to the hymns that she encouraged Johnnie to repeat. In that clear, sweet enunciation, and simple, reverent manner, they evidently had a great effect. He listened for the first time with his heart, and the caresses, at which Johnnie glowed with pleasure as a high favour, were, she knew, given with a species of wondering veneration. It was Johnnie's presence that most soothed him; his distressing, careworn expression passed away at the first sight of the innocent, pensive face, and returned not while the child was before him, bending over a book, or watching the baby, or delighted at having some small service to perform. Johnnie, on his side, was never so well satisfied as in the room, and nothing but Violet's fears for his health prevented the chief part of his time from being spent there.

Her own strength was just sufficient for the day. She could sit by Arthur's side, comprehend his wishes by his face, and do more to relieve and sustain him than all the rest; and, though she looked wretchedly weak and worn, her power of doing all that was needed, and looking upon him with comforting refreshing smiles, did not desert her. The night watch she was forced to leave to be divided between his father and sister, with the assistance alternately of Sarah and the regular nurse, and she was too much exhausted when she went to bed, for Theodora to venture on disturbing her by an unnecessary word.

Theodora's longing was to be continually with her brother; but this could only be for a few hours at night; and then the sight of his suffering, and the difficulty of understanding his restlessness of mind, made her so wretched, that it took all the force of her strong resolution to conceal her unhappiness; and she marvelled the more at the calmness with which the feeble frame of Violet endured the same

scene. The day was still more t
was the care of the children, and l
a copy of her own untamed self
charge for a desponding heart and

On the fifth morning the docto
provement; but to his attendant
from being less passive and retu
and manifestation of oppression a
tempts at questions, insisting on b
nor call had been kept from him;
that had been left, and examine
renew the conversation with his fa
silenced him at once, and left the
disappointed that Violet was griev
of the doctors, that it might hav
the risk of letting him speak, for t
at rest.

Lord Martindale, however, s
mitting a word to be uttered, tha
sent himself, and went out to try
ingham, and ask whether he c
Arthur's trouble.

The children were out of doo
fiting by the interval of quiet to
she heard James announce, "Mr.

She looked up, then down. H
brother; the next brought the who
and she could not meet his eye.

He advanced, but there was n
a stranger, he said, "I hope Colo

Could it be himself? She gav
he chose to disown her; to meet
held out! Rallying her fortitude,
you; we hope —"

She got no further — her hand
I did not know you."

She had forgotten her altere

smiled, and said, "Yes, I am a strange figure. They think Arthur a little better to-day, thank you."

"How has it been?"

He listened to the details with eagerness, that dismissed from her mind the sickening apprehension of his knowing of any hidden evil; then, saying he was pressed for time, begged her to ask Mrs. Martindale to let him speak to her on a matter of such importance that he must venture on disturbing her.

Theodora beckoned to Violet at the door, hoping to elude Arthur's notice; but any attempt at secrecy made him more distrustful, and the name had hardly been whispered before she was startled by hearing — "Bring him here."

Much frightened, the wife and sister expostulated, thus making him more determined; he almost rose on his elbow to enforce his wishes, and at last said, "You do me more harm by preventing it."

Violet felt the same; and in fear and trembling begged Theodora to call Percy. She knew herself to be responsible for the danger, but saw the impossibility of preventing the interview without still greater risk. Indeed, while Theodora delayed Percy with cautions, impatience and the fear of being disappointed were colouring each sunken cheek with a spot of burning red, the hands were shaking uncontrollably, and the breath was shorter than ever, so that she was on the point of going to hasten the visitor, when he knocked at the door.

She signed to him at once to turn to Arthur, who held out his hand, and met his greeting with an anxious, imploring gaze, as if to ask whether, after all, he brought him hope.

"Well," said Percy, cheerfully, "I think it is settled."

Arthur relaxed that painful tension of feature, and lay back on his pillows, with a relieved, though inquiring look.

"Begging your pardon for being meddlesome," continued Percy, "I thought I saw a way of being even with that scoundrel. Your papers had got into my pocket, and as I

had nothing else to do, I looked them over after parting with you, and saw a way out of the difficulty. I was coming in the morning to return them and propound my plan, but finding that you could not be seen, I ventured to take it on myself at once, for fear he should get out of reach."

He paused, but Arthur's eyes asked on.

"I had reason to think him gone to Paris. I followed him thither, and found he was making up to Mrs. Finch. I let him know that I was aware of this villany, and of a good deal more of the same kind, and threatened that, unless he came in to my terms, I would expose the whole to his cousin, and let her know that he is at this moment engaged to Miss Brandon. She is ready to swallow a good deal, but that would have been too much, and he knew it. He yielded, and gave me his authority to break up the affair."

As Arthur was still attentive and anxious, Percy went on to explain, that he had next gone to the man who kept the horses, and by offers of ready money and careful inspection of his bills, had reduced his charge to a less immoderate amount. The money had been advanced for a portion of Arthur's share of the debts, and a purchaser was ready for the horses, whose price would clear off the rest; so that nothing more was wanted but Arthur's authority for the completion of the sale, which would free him from all present danger of pressure upon that score.

"Supposing you do not disavow me," said Percy. "I must ask pardon for going such lengths without permission."

A clutch of the hand was the answer, and Percy then showed him the accounts only waiting for his signature.

The money advanced was nearer five thousand pounds than four; and Arthur, pointing to the amount, inquired, by look and gesture, "Where does it come from?"

"Never mind, it was honestly come by. It is a lot that has accumulated out of publishing money, and was always bothering me with railway shares. It will do as well in your keeping."

"It is throwing it into a gulf."

"In your father's, then. I will take care of myself, and speak when I want it. Don't trouble your father about it till he sees his way."

"I must give you my bond."

"As you please, but there is no hurry."

Arthur, however, was bent on giving his signature at once, and, as he looked towards his wife and child, said, "For their sakes, thank you."

"I did it for their sakes," said Percy, gruffly, perhaps to check Arthur's agitation; but, as if repenting of what sounded harsh, he took the infant in his arms, saying to Violet, "You have a fine fellow here! Eyes and forehead — his father all over."

Arthur held out his hand eagerly. "Let him be your godson — make him like any one but me."

Percy took two turns in the room before he could answer: "My godson, by all means, and thank you; but you will have the making of him yourself. You are much better than I expected."

Arthur shook his head; but Violet, with a look, sufficient reward for anything, said, "It is you that are making him better."

He replied by inquiries about the christening. The baby was a day less than four weeks old, and Violet was anxious to have him baptized; so that it was arranged that it should take place immediately on Percy's return from Worthbourne, whither he was to proceed that same afternoon, having hitherto been delayed by Arthur's affairs. This settled, he took leave. Arthur fervently pressed his hand, and, as Violet adjusted the pillows, sank his head among them as if courting rest, raising his eyes once more to his "friend in need," and saying, "I shall sleep now."

Violet only hoped that Mr. Fotheringham understood what inexpressible gratitude was conveyed in those words, only to be appreciated after watching those six wakeful, straining days and nights.

Meantime, Theodora waited in fear, too great at first to

leave space for other thoughts; but as time passed, other memories returned. On coming to summon Percy she had found him standing before the little stuffed owl, and she could not but wonder what thoughts it might have excited, until suddenly the recollection of Jane dissipated her visions with so violent a revulsion that she was shocked at herself, and perceived that there was a victory to be achieved.

"It shall be at once," said she. "I *will* mention her. To be silent would show consciousness. Once done, it is over. It is easier with my altered looks. I am another woman now.

She heard him coming down, and almost hoped to be spared the meeting, but, after a moment's pause, he entered.

"Well," he said, "I hope I have done him no harm. I think better of him now than when I came home. He looks to me as if the worst was over."

They were the first words of hope, and spoken in that hearty, cheery voice, they almost overset her weakened spirits, and the struggle with tears would not let her answer.

"You have had a most trying time," said he, in the kind way that stirred up every old association; but that other thought made her guarded, and she coldly hurried out the words —

"Yes; this is the first time my father has been out. He went in search of you, to ask how you met poor Arthur, who has been able to give no account of himself."

"We met on board the steamer. He had been obliged to leave Boulogne without finishing his business there, and I went back to settle it for him."

"And the papers he had lost?"

"I had them: it is all right."

"And his mind relieved?"

"I hope it is."

"Oh! then, we may dare to hope!" cried she, breathing freely.

"I trust so; but I must go. Perhaps I may meet Lord Martindale."

With a great effort, and a "now-or-never" feeling, she abruptly said, "I hope Jane is well."

He did not seem to understand; and confused, as if she had committed an over familiarity of title, she added, "Mrs. Fotheringham."

She was startled and hurt at his unconstrained manner.

"Very well, I believe. I shall see her this evening at Worthbourne."

"Has she been staying there long?" said Theodora, going on valiantly after the first plunge.

"Ever since the summer. They went home very soon after the marriage."

A new light broke in on Theodora. She was tingling in every limb, but she kept her own counsel, and he proceeded. "I saw them at Paris, and thought it did very well. She is very kind to him, keeps him in capital order, and has cured him of some of his ungainly tricks."

"How did it happen? I have heard no particulars."

"After his mother's death poor Pelham was less easily controlled; he grew restless and discontented, and both he and my uncle fell under the influence of an underbred idle youth in the neighbourhood, who contrived at last to get Sir Antony's consent to his taking Pelham abroad with him as his pupil. At Florence they met with these ladies, who made much of their cousin, and cajoled the tutor, till this marriage was effected."

"She must be nearly double his age."

"She will manage him the better for it. There was great excuse for her. The life she was obliged to lead was almost an apology for any way of escape. If only it had been done openly, and with my uncle's consent, no one could have had any right to object, and I honestly believe it is a very good thing for all parties."

"Would Sir Antony have consented?"

"I have little doubt of it. He was hurt at first, but he was always fond of Jane. She is very attentive to him, and I hope makes him quite comfortable. He wrote to ask me to

come and see them at Worthbourne, and I am on my way. I see it is getting late. Good bye."

Theodora's heart had been bounding all this time. Her first impulse was to rush up to tell Violet; but as this could not be, she snatched up a bulky red volume, and throwing over the leaves till she came to F. — Fotheringham, Sir Antony, of Worthbourne, looked down the list of his children's names, and beheld that the only one not followed by the fatal word *died* was Antony Pelham.

What had they all been doing not to have thought of this before? However, she recollected that it would have seemed as impossible that the half-witted youth should marry as that he should be on the continent. The escape from the certainty that had so long weighed on her, taught her what the pain had been; and yet, when she came to analyze her gladness, it seemed to melt away.

She dwelt on her period of madness — her wilful, repeated rejection of warning; she thought of the unhappy Derby day — of her own cold "Very well" — her flirtation with Lord St. Erme. She recollected the passage with Annette Moss: and then, for her present person, it was changed beyond recognition, as had just been proved; nor could she wonder, as turning to the mirror, she surveyed the figure in black silk and plain cap, beyond which the hair scarcely yet peeped out — the clearness and delicacy of skin destroyed, the face haggard with care and sorrow, the eyelids swollen by watchful nights. She almost smiled at the contrast to the brilliant, flashing-eyed, nut-brown maid in the scarlet-wreathed coronal of raven hair, whom she had seen the last time she cared to cast a look in that glass.

"I am glad I am altered," said she, sternly. "It is well that I should not remind him of her on whom he wasted his hope and affection. It is plain that I shall never marry, and this is a mask under which I can meet him with indifference like his own. Yes, it was absolute indifference — nothing but his ordinary kindliness and humanity; neither embarrassment nor confusion — just as he would have met any old

woman at Brogden. If he remembers that time at all, it is as a past delusion, and there is nothing in me to recall what he once liked. He did not know me! Nonsense! I thought I was content only to know him safe from Jane — still his real self. I am. That is joy! All the rest is folly and selfishness. That marriage! How disgusting — and what crooked ways! But what is that to me? Jane may marry the whole world, so that Percy is Percy!"

The children were heard on the stairs, and Helen rushed in, shouting, in spite of the silencing finger, "Aunt, it is the owl man!" and Johnnie himself, eager and joyous, "It is the man who came with papa."

"He met us," said Helen. "He knew my name, and he asked Annie's, and carried her to our door."

"He said he had been into papa's room," said Johnnie, "and had seen baby. He is a very good-natured geatleman. Don't you like him, aunt Theodora?"

"And oh! aunt, he asked me whether we ever went to Brogden; and when he heard that we had been at the parsonage, he said he lived there when he was a little boy, and our nursery was his;" chattered on Helen. "He asked if we were in the fire; and you know Johnnie can't bear to hear of that; so I told him how funny it was when you came and pulled me out of bed, and we went down the garden with no shoes. And he asked whether that was the way you had grown so ugly, aunt Theodora?"

"No, Helen, he did not say that; for he was a gentleman," interposed Johnnie; "he only said he was afraid our aunt had been a sufferer, and Sarah told —"

"And I told," again broke in Helen, "how cousin Hugh said it was an honour and a glory to be burnt like you; and I told him how I got the water and should have put out the fire, if that horrid Simmonds had not carried me away, and I wish he had not. So long as I had not my curls burnt off," said Miss Helen, pulling one of the glossy chestnut rings into her sight, like a conscious beauty as she was.

"He asked Sarah all about it," said Johnnie; "and he

said we had a very good aunt; and, indeed, we have!" climbing caressingly into her lap. "Then he met grandpapa, and they are walking in the square together."

So Mr. Fotheringham could be in no real haste to be gone, and had only hurried away to avoid Theodora. However, there was no more musing time, the children's dinner was ready, and she was going down with the little girls, when her father entered. "How is Arthur?"

It was answered by Johnnie, who was flying down stairs with joyous, though noiseless, bounds; his whole person radiant with good tidings. "Papa is asleep! Grandpapa. Papa it fast asleep!"

"Have you been in the room?"

"No; mamma came to the door and told me. Baby is gone up to our nursery, and nobody is to make the least noise, for papa is gone to sleep so comfortably!"

The boy had caught so much gladness from his mother's look, that he almost seemed to understand the importance of that first rest. His grandfather stroked his hair, and in the same breath with Theodora, exclaimed, "It is owing to Percy!"

"Has he told you about it?" said Theodora.

"So much as that there is a final break with that fellow Gardner — a comfort at least. Percy said they had got their affairs into a mess; Arthur had been trying to free himself, but Gardner had taken advantage of him and used him shamefully, and his illness had forced him to come away, leaving things more complicated than ever. There was a feeling of revenge it seems, at Arthur not having consented to some disgraceful scheme of his; but Percy did not give me the particulars. Meeting him in the steamer, ill and desperate — poor fellow — Percy heard the story, took care of him, and saw him home; then finding next morning what a state he was in, and thinking there might be immediate demands —"

"Oh! that was the terrible dread and anxiety!"

"He did what not one man in a million would have done.

He went off, and on his own responsibility adjusted the matter, and brought Gardner to consent. He said it had been a great liberty, and that he was glad to find he had not gone too far, and that Arthur approved."

"Do you know what it was?"

"No; he assured me all was right, and that there was no occasion to trouble me with the detail. I asked if any advance was needed, and he said no, which is lucky, for I cannot tell how I could have raised it. For the rest, I could ask him no questions. No doubt it is the old story, and, as Arthur's friend, he could not be willing to explain it to me. I am only glad it is in such safe hands. As to its being a liberty, I told him it was one which only a brave thorough-going friend would have taken. I feel as if it might be the saving of his life."

Theodora bent down to help little Anna, and said, "You know it is Sir Antony Fotheringham's son that Miss Gardner married?"

"Ay!" said Lord Martindale, so much absorbed in his son as to forget his daughter's interest in Percival Fotheringham — "He says Arthur's cough did not seem so painful as when he saw him before, and that he even spoke several times. I am frightened to think what the risk has been of letting him in."

"Arthur insisted," said Theodora, between disappointment at the want of sympathy, and shame for having expected it; and she explained how the interview had been unavoidable.

"Well, it is well over, and no harm done," said Lord Martindale, not able to absolve the sister from imprudence. After a space, he added, "What did you say? The deficient young Fotheringham married?"

"Yes, to Jane Gardner."

"Why, surely some one said it was Percy himself!"

"So Violet was told at Rickworth."

Lord Martindale here suddenly recollected all, as his daughter perceived by his beginning to reprove Helen for

stirring about the salt. Presently he said, "Have you heard that the other sister, the widow — what is her name?"

"Mrs. Finch —"

"Is going to be foolish enough to marry that Gardner. She was your friend, was not she?"

"Yes, poor thing. Did you hear much about her?"

"Percy says that she was kind and attentive to the old man, as long as he lived, though she went out a great deal while they lived abroad, and got into a very disreputable style of society there. Old Finch has left everything in her power; and from some words overheard on the quay at Boulogne, Percy understood that Gardner was on his way to pay his court to her at Paris. There was a former attachment it seems, and she is actually engaged to him. One can hardly pity her. She must do it with her eyes open."

Theodora felt much pity. She had grieved at the entire cessation of intercourse, even by letter, which had ensued when the Finches went to the Continent; and she thought Georgina deserved credit for not having again seen Mark, when, as it now appeared, there had lurked in her heart affection sufficient to induce her to bestow herself, and all her wealth, upon him, spendthrift and profligate as she must know him to be. Miserable must be her future life; and Theodora's heart ached as she thought of wretchedness unaided by that which can alone give support through the trials of life, and bring light out of darkness. She could only pray that the once gay companion of her girlhood, whose thoughtlessness she had encouraged, might yet, even by affliction, be led into the thorny path which Theodora was learning to feel was the way of peace.

Arthur was wakened by the recurring cough, and the look of distress and anxiety returned; but the first word, by which Violet reminded him of Percy's call, brought back the air of relief and tranquillity. Mr. Harding, at his evening visit, was amazed at the amendment; and Johnnie amused his grandfather by asking if the owl man was really a doctor, or whether Sarah was right when she said he

had rescued papa and his portmanteau out of a den of thieves.

When Violet left the room at night, the patient resignation of her face was brightening into thankfulness; and while preparing for rest, she could ask questions about the little girls. Theodora knew that she might tell her tale; and sitting in her favourite place on Violet's footstool, with her head bent down, she explained the error between the two cousins.

"How glad I am!" said the soft voice, ever ready to rejoice with her. "Somehow, I had never recollected it, he is so like what he used to be. I am very glad."

"Don't treat it as if it was to concern me," said Theodora. "I care only as he remains the noblest of men."

"That he is."

"Don't wish any more, nor think I do," said Theodora. "I never liked stories of young ladies who reform on having the small-pox. It is time nonsense should be out of my head when a man does not know me again."

"Oh! surely — Did he not?"

"Not till I spoke. No wonder, and it is better it should be so. I am unworthy any way. O, Violet, *now* will you not let me ask your forgiveness?"

"What do you mean, dearest?"

"Those races."

Violet did not shrink from the mention; she kissed Theodora's brow, while the tears, reserved for the time of respite, dropped fast and bright.

"Poor dear," she said; "how much you have suffered!"

There was silence for some moments. Theodora striving to keep her tears as quiet as her sister's.

"I think," said Violet, low and simply, "that we shall be happy now."

Then, after another silence, "Come, if we go on in this way, we shall not be fit for to-morrow, and you have only half a night. Dearest, I wish I could save you the sitting up! If he is better to-morrow, Johnnie shall take you for a walk."

He was better, though the doctors, dismayed at yesterday's imprudence, preached strenuously on his highly precarious state, and enforced silence and absence of excitement. Indeed, his condition was still such that the improvement could only be seen in occasional gleams; and as the relief from mental anxiety left him more attention to bestow on the suffering from the disorder, he was extremely depressed and desponding, never believing himself at all better.

The experiment of a visit from the little girls was renewed, but without better success; for the last week had increased the horrors of his appearance; and Theodora reported that Johnnie had confided to her, as a shocking secret, that the reason why Helen could not bear to go near papa was, that he looked exactly like Red Ridinghood's wolf.

Violet was grateful for the saying, for it was the first thing that drew a smile from Arthur, and to court the child became a sort of interest and occupation that distracted his thoughts from himself. It was touching to see him watching her, as she ran in and out, trying to catch her eye, stretching out his hand invitingly, holding up fruit to allure her, and looking with fond, proud, yet mournful eyes, on her fresh healthful beauty. She used to try not to see him, and would race past at full speed, and speak to her mamma with her back to him; but gradually some mysterious attraction in that silent figure won sidelong glances from her, and she began to pause, each time with a longer and fuller tiptoe gaze, both hands pressed down on the top of her head, and a look like a wild fawn, till all at once, the *Wehrwolf* feeling would seize her, and she would turn and dash off as if for her life, while his eager, pleased face relaxed into disappointment, and her mother still said that time would bring her round.

At last, she took them completely by surprise, suddenly launching herself on the bed, and plunging her face into the midst of the black bristles; then, leaping down, and rushing to the door as if expecting to be caught. So violent a proceeding was almost more than Arthur could bear, and Violet,

rising to smooth the coverings, began to preach gentleness; but shaken as he was, he was too much gratified to permit the reproof, smiled and held up a bunch of grapes to invite the little maid back. But this was an offence; she put her hands behind her, and, with a dignified gesture, announced, "I do not give kisses for grapes. I did it because Johnnie will not let me alone, and said I was unkind."

"Theodora all over!" said her father, much entertained.

It was a great step that he had discovered that the children could afford him diversion, especially now, when nothing else could have served to while away the tedious hours. He could bear no reading aloud from any one but Johnnie, whom he would not refuse; and to whom he listened with pride in a performance he fancied wonderful, while the little books cost no effort of attention, and yet their simple lessons floated on his thoughts, and perchance sank into his heart. Or when he lay panting and wearied out with oppression, the babe's movements would attract his eye, and the prattlings of the little girls at their mamma's side would excite a languid curiosity that drew him out of himself. Sometimes that childish talk left food for thought. One day when the children had been sent into the next room to share some fruit from the plate by his bed-side, Helen's voice was overheard saying, "I wish papa would never get well!"

"Helen! Helen, how can you?" pleaded her brother's shocked voice.

"He is so much more good-natured when he is ill," was Helen's defence. "I like him now; I don't like him at all when he is well, because then he is always cross. Don't you think so, Johnnie?"

"That is not kind of you when he lies there, and it hurts him so sadly to breathe. You should wish him to be well, Helen."

"If he would be kind to me."

"O, you don't know what it feels like to be ill," said Johnnie. "I do want to see him strong and able to ride, and

go out to his soldiers again. `I hope he will be kind still, and not go away and make mamma unhappy —".

"If he would ever lead me by the hand, like the little girl's papa at the house with the parrot, I should like that sort of papa, if he was not a little thin short ugly man. Should not you, Johnnie?"

"No! I never shall like anything so well as my own papa. I do love him with my whole, whole heart! I am so glad he will let us love him now! It seems to come over me in the morning, and make me so glad when I remember it."

Violet had been on the point of stopping this conversation, but Arthur would not permit her, and listened with his eyes filling with tears.

"What have you done to that boy?" he murmured.

"It is his own loving self," said Violet.'

Arthur pressed her hand to his lips. "My poor children! If papa ever were to get well —"

And Violet regretted that he had heard, for his emotion threw him back for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XI.

Then weep not o'er the hour of pain,
As those who lose their all;
Gather the fragments that remain,
They 'll prove nor few nor small.
M. L. DUNCAN.

IN the meantime Theodora and her father had been brought into contact with visitors from the external world. One morning James brought in a card and message of inquiry from Lord St. Erme, and Lord Martindale desired that he should be admitted. Theodora had just time to think how ridiculous it was of her to consider how she should appear to another old lover, before he came in, colouring deeply, and bending his head low, not prepared to shake hands; but when hers was held out, taking it with an eager yet bashful promptitude.

After a cordial greeting between him and her father, it

was explained that he had not entirely recovered what he called his accident, and had come to London for advice; he had brought a parcel from Wrangerton for Mrs. Martindale, and had promised to carry the Moss family the latest news of the Colonel. While this was passing, and Lord Martindale was talking about Arthur, Theodora had time to observe him. The foreign dress and arrangement of hair were entirely done away with, and he looked like an Englishman, or rather an English boy, for the youthfulness of feature and figure was the same; the only difference was that there was a greater briskness of eye, and firmness of mouth, and that now that the blush on entering had faded, his complexion showed the traces of recent illness, and his cheeks and hands were very thin. When Theodora thought of the heroism he had shown, of her own usage of him, and of his remembrance of her in the midst of his worst danger, she could not see him without more emotion than she desired. He was like a witness against her, and his consciousness *would* infect her! She longed for some of the cool manner that had come so readily with Percy, and with some difficulty brought out a composed inquiry for Lady Lucy; but he disconcerted her again by the rapid eager way in which he turned round at her voice.

"Lucy is very well, thank you; I left her staying with my cousins, the Delavals. It is very hard to get her away from home, and she threatens not to stay a day after my return." He spoke in a hasty confused way, as if trying to spin everything out of the answer, so as to remain conversing with Theodora as long as possible.

"How long shall you be in town?" she asked, trying to find something she could say without awkwardness.

"I can hardly tell. I have a good deal to do. Pray" — turning to Lord Martindale — "can you tell me which is the best shop to go to for agricultural implements?"

Speed the plough! Farming is a happy sedative for English noblemen of the nineteenth century, thought Theodora, as she heard them discussing subsoil and rocks, and

thought of the poet turned high farmer, and forgetting even love and embarrassment! However, she had the satisfaction of hearing "No, we cannot carry it out thoroughly there without blowing up the rocks, and I cannot have the responsibilityof defacing nature."

"Then you cannot be a thorough-going farmer."

"I cannot afford it, and would not if I could. It is only for the sake of showing the tenants that I am not devoid of the spirit of the age."

Country gentlemen being happier in agricultural implement shops than anywhere else, Lord Martindale offered to accompany his friend and give his counsel. He would go upstairs to see how Arthur was, and carry the parcel to Violet.

"Pray tell Mrs. Martindale that her mother and sisters sent all manner of kind messages. Very pleasing people they are," said Lord St. Erme; "and Mrs. Moss was so very kind to my poor little sister that we hardly know how to be sufficiently grateful."

"I never saw any of the family but the brother," said Theodora.

"And he is not the best specimen," said Lord St. Erme. "Some of the young ladies are remarkably nice people, very sensible, and Lucy is continually discovering some kindness of theirs among the poor people. Ah! that reminds me, perhaps you could tell me whether you know anything of a school in your neighbourhood, from which a master has been recommended to me — St. Mary's, Whiteford."

"I don't know much of it; I believe the clergyman takes pains about it."

"Do you think they would have a superior man there? Our funds are low, and we must not look for great attainments at present. It is easy to cram a man if he is intelligent; I only want a person who can keep up what is taught, and manage the reading-room on nights when we are not there."

"Have you a reading-room?"

"Only a Wrangerton as yet; I want to set up another at Coalworth."

"Then you find it answer? How do you arrange?"

"Two nights in the week we read to them, teach singing, or get up a sort of lecture. The other days there are books, prints, newspapers; and you would be surprised to see how much they appreciate them. There 's a lad now learning to draw, whose taste is quite wonderful! And if you could have seen their faces when I read them *King Henry IV.!* I want to have the same thing at Coalworth for the winter — not in summer. I could not ask them to spend a minute, they can help, out of the free air and light; but in winter I cannot see those fine young men and boys dozing themselves into stolidity."

Was this the man who contemned the whole English peasantry, colliers especially? Theodora rejoiced that his hobby had saved her a world of embarrassment, and still more that their *tête-à-tête* was interrupted. Lady Elizabeth Brandon begged to know whether Miss Martindale could see her.

She was on her way through London; and having just heard of Colonel Martindale's illness, had come to inquire, and offer to be useful. Emma remained at the hotel. After Lord Martindale's cheerful answer and warm thanks, the gentlemen set off together, and Theodora sat down with her good old friend to give the particulars, with all the fulness belonging to the first relief after imminent peril.

After the first, however, Lady Elizabeth's attention wandered; and before the retrograding story had gone quite back to the original Brogden cough, she suddenly asked if Percival Fotheringham was in England.

"Yes, at Worthbourne. You know it was his cousin —"

"I know — it was a mistake," said Lady Elizabeth, hurrying over the subject, as by no means suited its importance in Theodora's eyes. "Can you tell me whether he has seen or heard anything of Mr. Mark Gardner?"

"Yes," said Theodora, surprised.

"I suppose you have not heard him say how he is conducting himself?"

"Have you heard that he is going to be married to Mrs. Finch?"

Theodora was astonished at the effect of this communication on her sober staid old friend. She started, made an incredulous outcry, caused it to be repeated, with its authority, then rose up, exclaiming, "The wretch! My poor Emma! I never was more rejoiced. But Emma!"

The sight of Theodora's surprise recalled her to herself. "Ah! you do not know?" she said; and having gone so far, was obliged to explain, with expressions of gratitude to Arthur and Violet for having so well guarded a secret that now might continue hidden for ever.

Theodora was slow in comprehending, so monstrous was the idea of Emma Brandon engaged to Mark Gardner! She put her hands before her eyes, and said she must be dreaming — she could not credit it. When convinced, there was something in her manner that pleased and comforted Lady Elizabeth by the kind feeling and high esteem it showed.

"Let me ask you one question, my dear," she said, "just to set my mind at rest. I was told that your brother's affairs were involved with those of that unhappy man. I trust it is no longer so."

Theodora explained, as far as she understood, how Percy had extricated him. "Ah!" said Lady Elizabeth, "I fear we are in some degree the cause. My poor Emma was imprudent enough to quote Colonel Martindale; and she has told me that she was frightened by a pale look of anger that crossed his face, and something which he muttered between his teeth. But he made her believe Arthur his seducer!"

"Poor Arthur! If you knew all!" said Theodora; "and who —" then, breaking off, "Percy did tell papa that it was all Mr. Gardner's revenge for Arthur's not consenting to some nefarious transaction. Depend upon it, that was

it! You asked Violet, you say. Percy said that, among the sentences he overheard on the quay, there was something about a wife who had crossed him, and who should suffer for it. He said it was spoken with a hard-hearted wickedness that, even when he did not know who it was, made him long to crush him like a reptile; and when he had seen Violet and the children, though it might he interference, he said he could as soon have left them in the folds of a serpent!"

"Ah! my poor girl!"

"But this frees her. Oh! she cannot grieve for such a wretch!"

"I fear her attachment is so strong that she will not see it in this light-"

"When he gives her up without a word, she ought to be too angry to grieve."

"I do not think that is in her nature."

"So much the better. Anger and comfort cannot go together. Oh, one so good and gentle must be helped! How I wish I could do anything for her; but she will be better at home. It is lucky there are no associations with him there."

"I wish she was at home. Theresa Marstone is staying with her brother in London, and I left her with Emma at the hotel."

"Fortunately there cannot be two ways of thinking on this matter," said Theodora.

Lady Elizabeth was too anxious to break the tidings to her daughter to wait at that time to see Violet; and went, promising to come to-morrow to report how the blow should have been borne.

Theodora was glad when she had a little space in which to think over the events of the day.

Ever since she had embraced the lesson of humility, the once despised Emma Brandon had been rising in her estimation. The lowliness of her manners, and the heart-whole consistency of her self-devotion, had far outweighed her

little follies, and, together with remorse for having depreciated and neglected her, had established her claim to respect and admiration.

And now to find the old prediction verified, and Emma led away by so absurd a delusion, might have seemed a triumph, had not Theodora been thoroughly humbled. She only saw a humiliating contrast between the true pure heart that blindly gave its full affections, and that which could pretend to have given itself away, and then, out of mere impatience of restraint, play with and torture the love it had excited, and still worse, foster an attachment it never meant to requite!

She was the more sensible of this latter delinquency now that Lord St. Erme had just been brought before her, deserving all that man could deserve; having more than achieved all to which she had incited him, and showing a constancy unchecked by the loss of her personal attractions. His blushing homage came almost as a compensating contrast after her severe mortification at Percy's surprise and subsequent cool composure.

While reproaching herself for this feeling, her father came home, and with him the Earl. They had been occupied all the afternoon, and had fallen into conversation on county business. Lord Martindale, finding his young friend was alone at his hotel, thought he had better dine with them, since Violet need not be troubled about it. Theodora wondered whether it had occurred to her father that some one else might be troubled, and that it might seem like a renewal of encouragement; but the fact was that, after ten days of the sick room, his society was a positive treat to Lord Martindale, and in advising him on magistrate's business, he forgot everything else.

The dinner went off without embarrassment. Lord St. Erme did indeed blush when he offered his arm to her; but with consideration that seemed to understand her, he kept up the conversation chiefly with Lord Martindale on rates, police, and committees.

She thought of the horror he had been wont to express of the English squirearchy, "whose arena is the quarter sessions;" and she remembered standing up for them, and declaring there was far more honest, sturdy, chivalrous maintenance of right and freedom in their history, than in all his beloved Lombardic republics. And now, what was he but a thorough-going country gentleman full of plans of usefulness, sparing neither thought, time, nor means; and though some of his views were treated by Lord Martindale as wild and theoretical, yet, at any rate, they proved that he had found living men a more interesting study than the Apollo Belvedere.

Theodora was resolved that Violet should see him, and now that the dinner was eaten, and beyond anxiety, went up to disclose his presence, and persuade her to go down to tea and leave her with the patient. She found it was well she had kept her counsel. Violet took it quietly enough; but Arthur chose to concern himself as to what wine had been produced, and would have sent a message to James, if his sister had not assured him that it was too late.

He insisted on Violet's going down to the drawing-room, and would not hear of Theodora's remaining with him. The nurse was in the outer room, and Johnnie was made supremely happy by being allowed to sit up an hour longer, to be his companion; and thus with Lord Martindale and Theodora making frequent expeditions to visit him, Violet was sufficiently tranquil to remain as long in the drawing-room as was worth the fatigue of the transit.

She could enjoy her talk with the Earl; and indeed, since Annette's visit, she had heard no tidings so full and satisfactory. He knew the name of every one at Wrangerton, — he seemed to have learnt to love Helvellyn, — he spoke very highly of Olivia's husband, Mr. Hunt, declaring that he liked nothing better than a visit to his most beautiful place, Lassonthwayte, a farm fit for the poets, and had learnt a great deal from him; and of Mrs. Moss, he talked with affectionate gratitude, that brought the tears into Violet's

eyes, especially when he promised to go and call on her immediately on his return, to tell her how Colonel Martindale was going on, and describe to her her grandchildren. He repeated to Violet how kind her mother had been to his sister, and how beautifully she had nursed him. Lord Martindale began to ask questions, which brought out a narration of his adventures in the coal-pit, given very simply, as if his being there had been a mere chance.

He allowed that he knew it to be dangerous, but added, that it was impossible to get things done by deputy, and that he had no choice but to see about it himself, and he dwelt much on the behaviour of the men.

"Did you give up hope?" asked Lord Martindale.

"For myself I did. The confined air oppressed me so much, even before the sense of hunger came on, that it seemed to take away all power of thought and action."

"Yet, you did think?" said Violet.

"I was obliged, for the men were more confounded and helpless at first, though, when once directed, nothing could be more resolute and persevering. Brave fellows! I would not but have had it happen! One seldom has such a chance of seeing the Englishman's gallant heart of obedient endurance. It was curious to observe the instinctive submission. Some were men who would not for worlds have touched their hats to me above ground; yet, as soon as I tried to take the lead, and make them think what could yet be done, they obeyed instantly, though I knew almost nothing compared to them; and, while they worked like giants, I could hardly move."

"Was it very acute suffering?"

"For the last two days it was, but it was worse for those who had to work. I was generally faint and drowsy, and could hardly rouse myself to speak a word of encouragement, which was what they wanted. They fancied it was vain to work towards the old shaft; but I was sure none of them could live to be dug out from above, and that it would be wrong to let them cease. I think, as well as I recollect,

that speaking was the worst pain of all! But it is no harm to know what the poor undergo."

"Hardly to such extremity," said Violet.

"Well, I know I shall never turn indifferently away again when I hear 'We are starving.' A man feels little for what he has not experienced."

"I suppose," said Lord Martindale, "that it has put an extinguisher on Chartism?"

"There are some determined village Hampdens still, but I think the fellow-feeling it has excited has done good. I have not been able to go among them since, but they have indefatigably come to inquire for me. The first Sunday I was able to come down stairs, I found the hall door beset with them in their best, looking like a synod of Methodist preachers. Poor Lucy shocked my aunt by running about crying, and shaking hands with their great horny fists. I fancy 'our young lady,' as they call her, is the strongest Anti-chartist argument."

Though talking in this animated manner, he was far from strong, and went away early, looking thoroughly tired. Theodora had stitched away throughout the conversation in silence; but Violet knew, by the very fixity of her eye, that she was feeling it deeply; and there was consciousness in the absence of word or look, with which she let the Earl bid her good night. It was a strange thing to have been in part the means of forming so noble a character, and yet to regard her share in it with nothing but shame.

Self-reproachful and unhappy, Theodora went to take her turn of watching her brother for the first part of the night. She could not have borne to be told, what was in fact the case, that he was generally more uncomfortable under her care than that of any one else, chiefly because there was not the restraint, either of consideration for his wife or of the authority of his father. Besides, she was too visibly anxious, too grave and sad, to find anything cheerful with which to divert his attention; and he was sure to become

restless and exacting, or else depressed, either as to his illness or his affairs.

To-night, he had discovered Lady Elizabeth's visit, and was anxious to know whether Gardner had broken with Miss Brandon. Theodora would not encourage his talking; and this teased him, only making him say more, till she had told all; adding, "O, Arthur! what a comfort it must be that this is brought upon you by your having tried to save Emma!"

"Not much of that. It was Violet. I would have stopped her writing if I could."

Perhaps this downfall of the heroism with which she had been endowing his resistance, was one of the most cruel blows of all.

"If he marries Mrs. Finch, he must at least pay off what he owes me;" and he began perplexing himself with reckonings. Theodora saw his brow drawn together, and his lips moving, and begged him to desist and try to sleep.

"You have interrupted me — I have lost it!" and he tried again. "No, I can't get it right. There is a lot of papers in my writing-case. You'll see to it. It will be something for Violet and the children. Mind the claim is sent in;" and again he strove to explain, while she entreated him to put such things out of his mind; and it ended in such violent coughing that Lord Martindale heard, came in, and with a look that told her how ill she managed, sent her to bed, where she vexed herself for hours at Arthur's seeming to dwell only on his gaming debts, instead of on what she longed to see occupying his mind. Her elasticity seemed to have been destroyed by her illness, and she had lost the vigour which once would have made her rise against depression. The re-appearance of Percy and of Lord St. Erme, seemed only to have wearied and perplexed her; and she lay awake, feeling worn, confused, and harassed, and only wishing to hide her head and be at rest.

Arthur had a bad night, and was not so well in the morning; and while Lord Martindale was wondering why Theo-

dora could not have been more cautious, the letters came in — one from Brogden — making it evident that Lady Martindale was so unwell and dispirited that she ought not to be left alone any longer. Lord Martindale, therefore, decreed that Theodora should return, taking with her the three eldest children. And she could make no objection; she ought to submit to be passively disposed of; and, grievous as it was to leave her brother and Violet, there was compensation in avoiding her former suitors.

Lady Elizabeth came in almost at the same time as Lord Martindale went out, after breakfast. She was in great distress. Poor Emma treated the whole as a calumny; and when shown the absolute certainty that Mark was at Paris, daily calling on Mrs. Finch, remained persuaded that his cousin had perverted him from the first, and was now trying to revive her pernicious influence, when he might have been saved; or that perhaps he was driven to an immediate wealthy marriage by his honourable feeling and his necessities. It was all her own fault for not having taken him at once. Lady Elizabeth had hardly been able to prevent her from writing to revoke the year's probation, and offer him all that was needed to satisfy his creditors.

Theodora could not help exclaiming, that she thought Emma would have had more dignity.

"So I told her, my dear; but it seemed to be no consolation. I do not feel secure that, though she has promised me not to write, Theresa Marstone may not."

"Is Miss Marstone still in his favour?"

"I can still less understand her view," said Lady Elizabeth, with a grave, sad simplicity, almost like satire; "she says it only convinces her that the Church of England does not know how to treat penitents."

Theodora could not help laughing; and Lady Elizabeth nearly joined her, though sighing and saying that such talk gave her other fears for Emma. She dreaded that Miss Marstone was unsettled in her allegiance to her Church, and that her power over Emma was infusing into her her own doubts.

"It is very sad — very strange! I cannot understand it," said Theodora. "I had always believed that such innocence and lowliness as Emma and Violet have was a guard against all snares; yet here is Emma led astray by these very excellences!"

"My dear," said Lady Elizabeth, "I think it is the want of that lowliness that is at the root with my poor child. It is a dangerous thing for a girl to throw herself into an exclusive friendship, especially when the disapproval of her own family is felt. I tried, but I never could like Theresa Marstone; and now I see that she liked to govern Emma, and depreciated my judgment — very justly, perhaps; but still I was her mother, and it was not kind to teach her to think doing as I wished, a condescension."

"So Emma sold all her senses to her friend?"

"Yes, and Miss Marstone keeps them still. Theresa taught her to think herself wiser than all, and their own way of talking, the proof of goodness."

"Ay! their passwords."

"Just so, and I do believe it was that kind of vanity that took from her her power of discerning and the instinctive shrinking from evil."

"It is very easy to make simplicity silliness," said Theodora. "I beg your pardon, Lady Elizabeth, I did not mean to blame her, but I was thinking how truly you spoke."

"And now, may I ask to see Mrs. Martindale; or will it be too much for her?"

"She will be glad, but she was tired with coming down to Lord St. Erme. And now, Arthur's bad night! Oh! Lady Elizabeth, you come from your griefs to ours. It is a shame to make you share them!"

"I do not think so," said Lady Elizabeth. "There is a tract of Hannah More's showing that to bear another's burden lightens our own; and all old people will tell you that many troubles together weigh less heavily than a single one."

Theodora could not think so; each of her cares seemed

to make the others worse, till the mere toil and vexation of Helen's lessons became serious; and yet, when the children were dismissed for their walk, she felt unable to profit by her leisure, otherwise than by sighing at the prospect of missing the power of looking in at Arthur from hour to hour.

She had not roused herself to occupation, when, to her dismay, Lord St. Erme was admitted. She began to say her father was not at home.

"Yes," he said, "I met him."

He means mischief! thought Theodora.

"He tells me that you are going away!"

"I believe so," said Theodora. "My mother is not well, and we cannot both be spared from home."

"Will you forgive me?" said the Earl, still standing, and with downcast eyes, and heightened complexion. "I know this is no fit time, but I could not part without one allusion. I would not harass you for worlds. A word from you, and I drop the subject."

"Oh! pray, then, say no more!" was her breathless entreaty.

He turned in silence, with a mournful gesture of farewell, and laid his hand on the door. She perceived her unkindness to one who had every claim to honour and consideration — one who had remembered her in well nigh the hour of death.

"Stay," she said; "I did not speak as I ought."

"I know I presumed too far," said Lord St. Erme, pausing; "I ask your pardon for disturbing you. It was selfish; but I could not let you go without once adverting to the subject —"

There was a tremor of voice, an eager look, that made her fear that the crushed hope was reviving, and she hastened to say, "The best thing would be that you should think no more about me."

"Impossible!" he vehemently cried; then, catching himself up, and speaking in the same deferential tone as at first, 'I owe you far too much to cease to think of you."

"It is a great pity," said Theodora; "I never deserved

such feelings, and they make me wish more and more that all could be undone."

"No! no!" exclaimed Lord St. Erme, his eyes lighting and his cheek glowing, while his fair young features wore a look that was all poet and knight. "Would I see what is past undone? It was the turning point of my life — the call to arms. Hitherto, life had been to me a dream in an enchanted garden, with the same secret weariness and dissatisfaction! I dread the thought of the time and means I lavished away, fancying because it was not vice it was not dissipation. It was then that I became unworthy of you. It was you who taught me where lies modern chivalry, and made my folly and conceit cease to despise the practical; showed me — may I quote German to you once more? — that '*Das Leben ist keine Lustfahrt, sondern theils ein Kampf, theils eine Pilgerreise.*' I took up my staff, at first, I own, in hopes of winning you —"

"You did not persevere merely for that reason?"

"No; when my eyes were once opened to the festering sin and misery around, when I saw the evil nourished at my own door by my neglect, and perceived that those dependent on me were doomed to degradation and oppression that I might gratify my craving for art, — then, indeed, I was appalled! Those paintings and statues seemed to cry out to me that human souls had been sacrificed to them! The toil and devotion of a life would be too little to atone! Oh! that it were more able and effective. Means and judgment go but a little way!"

"Your heart and happiness are in the work," said Theodora, seeing how he was carried away by his feelings.

"Yes. There is a sense like the labourer's at his daily task; and though there is the mountain of things undone, there is the hope that all are not wilfully neglected. It is for this that I longed to thank you. When I was in danger, I knew what it would have been to wait for death before I thought of — of the way of peace. I blessed you in my heart then — I thank you now."

"Thank Him who has brought good out of evil," was all Theodora could say.

He bowed his head gravely, and continued: "Now, thank you again for having listened. It has been a great satisfaction to me to acknowledge my obligations. Do not suppose I came to London intending to distress you with my pertinacity, or with any idea of having earned your favour. I was obliged to come; and when once near you, I could not bear to separate without, at least, entreating to know whether the former obstacle exists."

"It does," said Theodora, looking down; "I believe it always will. I lament, more than I can express, my conduct towards you; and what you have told me grieves me more in one way, though, in another, it is most consoling. You have the true secret of peace, and I know all must be well with you. If you had done otherwise, it would have been far worse for me. Tell Lucy I have not forgotten her. I am sure she has the true light-hearted sort of happiness."

"She has, indeed," said Lord St. Erme; and he entered into a description of his sister's doings; her perfect content with their seclusion, and her influence over the dependents. So eager did he grow in his favourite subject, the welfare of his people, that he seemed to have forgotten what had brought him to Cadogan-place, and Theodora was convinced that though the being brought into contact with her had for the time renewed the former attachment, it was in reality by no means the prominent thought of his life. His duties, and the benefit of his colliers, were what engrossed his mind; and with his sister to render his home happy, everything else was secondary. When it did occur to him to think of love, it was for Theodora; but he had no more time for such thoughts than most other busy practical men.

He discoursed upon his schools and reading-rooms till the children came in, and then bade her good bye, quite as if he had talked himself back into an every-day state of feeling.

Was Theodora mortified? She went to her own room to

analyze her sensations; but was almost immediately followed by Johnnie, coming to tell her that the owl-man was in the drawing-room.

"Another who is consoled!" thought she. "Humiliating, indeed, it is to see such complete cures. There is no need to be absurd and conscious at this meeting! But here I do, indeed, need forgiveness — how my heart aches to ask it — his mere pardon for my offences! If I could only have it out with him without compromising womanly proprieties! That can't be; I must bear it!"

On the stairs she heard Helen's voice. "He came yesterday, to the evening dinner; but I don't like him."

"Why not?" asked Percy.

"Because he says I am just like aunt Theodora, and I am not."

Theodora knew whom she meant. Lord St. Erme had been much struck by her little niece's resemblance, and Helen resented the comparison as an indignity to her beauty. She felt extremely annoyed at Percy's hearing this; then recollected it did not signify to him, and entered just as he was telling little Miss Vanity that she was the silliest child he had ever the honour of meeting.

There was some constraint, on her part, in the short conversation on Arthur's health that ensued, before he went up; and he only returned to the drawing-room for a moment, to assure her that he thought Arthur much better than when he had last seen him.

"He avoids me! he cannot endure me!" she thought; and yet she felt doubly averse to the idea of returning to Brogden.

Lord Martindale came in with a look of expectation on his face which grieved Theodora, for she knew her refusal would be a disappointment to him. He sent the children away, paused for her to begin, and at last asked:

"Well, my dear, has Lord St. Erme been here?"

"Yes, Papa;" and it was plain enough how it had been.

Lord Martindale sighed. The rest being equal, it was not

in human nature not to prefer an Earl to an almost penniless author. "I would not urge you on any account," he said; "but I wish it could have been otherwise."

"So do I, most heartily," said Theodora.

"It is very different now," said Lord Martindale. "Four years ago I could hardly have wished it. Now, I think most highly of him, and I should have been rejoiced to have seen his constancy rewarded."

"I am ashamed and grieved," said Theodora. "He did, indeed, deserve better things. He is a noble character; and I cannot honour or esteem him enough, nor sufficiently regret the way I treated him. But, indeed, Papa, it would not be right. I cannot help it."

"Well, there is no more to be said," sighed Lord Martindale. "I know you will do right."

Something was won since her former dismissal of the Earl! Her father gave her a look full of confidence and affection; and made happy by it, she rallied her spirits and said, "Besides, what a pair it would be! We should be taken for a pretty little under-graduate and his mother!"

"That will not last, my dear," said Lord Martindale, vexed, though smiling at her droll manner. "You are younger than he."

"In years, but not in mind," said Theodora. "No, no, Papa; you have me for life, and it is hard you should be so anxious to get rid of me!"

"I only wish to consult your happiness, my dear child."

"And that always was in fancying myself necessary," said Theodora, gaily, though there was a trembling in her voice; and when she went up to her own room, she hid her face in her hands, and felt as if life was very dreary and uninteresting, and as if it was a miserable exile to be sent into the country just now, to have to force cheerful conversation for her mother, and to be wearied with Helen's wild spirits. "But have I not deserved everything? And after my brother has been spared so far, how can I repine at any selfish trouble?"

CHAPTER XII.

Herself, almost heartbroken now,
Was bent to take the vestal vow,
And shroud, within St. Hilda's gloom,
Her wasted hopes and withered bloom.
SCOTT.

VIOLET, when called to consult with her father-in-law in the outer room, felt a sort of blank apprehension and consternation at the idea of being separated from her children; and a moment's reflection satisfied her that in one case at least she might rightly follow the dictates of her own heart. She said that she thought Johnnie could not be spared by his papa.

Lord Martindale's eye followed hers, and through the half-closed door saw Johnnie, sitting on the bed, reading to his father, who listened with amused, though languid attention.

"I believe you are right," he said; "though I wish I had the boy in the country doing no lessons. He puts me more in mind of his uncle every day."

"One of the highest compliments Johnnie has ever had," said Violet, colouring with pleasure; "but I am afraid to trust him away from me and Mr. Harding in the winter because of his croup."

"Ah! then it cannot be," he answered; "and I do not think I would take him from his father now, but his sisters must come; they would be too much for you without Theodora."

Violet could only be mournfully thankful, and the project was in time laid before Arthur.

"Send my little girls away!" said he, looking discomfited.

"Oh! if you wish to keep them" — joyfully exclaimed Violet.

"I thought that if Theodora went home, Violet would hardly be able to manage them," said Lord Martindale.

"If they are in her way," said Arthur, and his eyes smiled at her, knowing what her decision would be.

"Oh! no, no! It was their grandpapa's kindness."

Johnnie and Helen here peeped into the room; Arthur beckoned to them, and said, "How should you like to go into the country with aunt Theodora?"

"To see grandmamma and the peacock?" said Lord Martindale.

Johnnie clung to his mother's hand, piteously whispering, "Oh! don't send me away, Mamma — I would try to bear it if I ought."

Helen climbed the bed, and sturdily seated herself close to her papa. "I shall not desert my father and mother," said she, with great dignity, drawing up her head.

"No more you shall, my little heroine!" said Arthur, throwing his arm round her, while she glanced with saucy triumph at her grandfather.

In the silence of night, when Arthur was alone with his father, he said, "If those little girls go away now, they will never remember me."

To this plea there could be no reply; for though the danger was no longer imminent, it was still extremely doubtful whether he would ever leave his room again.

His wish to keep the children made Lord Martindale reconsider of sending Theodora home, and he desired Violet to choose between her and himself. She thought Theodora the most effective, and Arthur seemed to prefer her remaining, so that she found herself disposed of according to her wishes, her father only stipulating that she should not neglect rest, air, or exercise, of which she stood in evident need.

Every one observed her haggard looks on the day when they met for the baptism of "Arthur Fotheringham." It was a melancholy christening, without the presence of either parent; and so all the little party felt it, and yet, if they could have seen into the recesses of the mother's heart, they would have found there were causes which made this baptism day better to her than any of the former ones.

The godfather came afterwards to see Arthur, who be-

lieved him more than all the doctors when he assured him he was making progress. Arthur began to speak of the debt; he wished before his father went, to have a settlement of accounts, take steps for selling his commission, and repaying Percy.

"No," said Percy, "wait till you are better and can look about you. Sell your commission indeed, and take the bread out of your children's mouths! No, if you did choose to do that, it must in honour and justice be divided among all your creditors."

Arthur was forced to give up.

Emma Brandon had not joined the christening party. Miss Marstone had actually written to Mark Gardner, and had in reply received an acknowledgment of her "good offices, which had gone far to enable him to justify the bets that before Christmas he would have a wife with ten thousand pounds a-year!" He did not quite venture to insult Miss Brandon, but sent her a cool message of farewell. The rest of the letter, the friends declared, was evidently by Mrs. Finch's dictation. They shut themselves up together; Lady Elizabeth was not allowed to help her daughter, and came to Cadogan-place chiefly that she might talk over her troubles with Theodora, who put her into communication with Percy, and from him she heard a brief sketch of Mr. Gardner's life and adventures, still less disposing her to desire him as a son-in-law.

She was certainly safe from this danger, but her cares were not thus ended. If Emma would have shared her griefs with her, and admitted her attempts at consolation, she would have been more at ease; but as it was, Emma was reserved with her, and attached herself solely to Theresa Marstone, whom she even made a sort of interpreter between her and her mother, so that Lady Elizabeth only knew as much of her mind as her confidante chose to communicate.

Not only was this most painful to her feelings as a mother, but she had serious doubts of the safety of such a

companion. The extreme silliness of Theresa's vanity and exclusiveness had long been visible, and as it was the young lady's fashion to imagine the defect anywhere but in her own judgment, there were symptoms of the mischief having been by her attributed to the Church of England. As if to console herself for the shock she had sustained, she was turning to a new fancy, for when a woman once begins to live upon excitement, she will seek for the intoxication anywhere.

This perception made Lady Elizabeth resolve that as long as she was mistress of Rickworth, she would not again invite Miss Marstone thither; while Emma was equally determined not to go home without her only friend. Thus the mother and daughter lingered on in London, Theresa often coming to spend the day with Emma, and Lady Elizabeth having recourse to the Martindale family, and trying to make herself of use by amusing the children, sitting in Arthur's room, or taking Theodora for a walk or drive.

One morning she came in to say that Emma was going to drive to Islington to call upon Miss Marstone, who had gone two days previously to stay with some friends there, and to beg that Theodora would accompany her. Aware that it would be as great a penance to Emma as to herself, Theodora would fain have been excused, but let herself be overruled on Lady Elizabeth's promise to supply her place at home, and assurance that it would be a positive relief that she should be of the party, even if she did not get out of the carriage, as a check upon the length of time Emma would spend with her friend.

The two unwilling companions set forth, each in her own corner of the carriage, Emma leaning back, her thick blue veil hiding her face; Theodora, who always repudiated veils, sitting upright, her face turned so as to catch the breeze on her hot temples, wishing she could turn herself into Violet, and possess her power of sweet persuasion and consolation. She could think of nothing to say, and began at last to fear that her silence might appear unkind. She tried to interest Emma by speaking of Johnnie, but she only

obtained brief replies, and the conversation had dropped before they left the streets and entered on suburban scenery. Theodora exclaimed at a gorgeous Virginian creeper — "Almost as fine as the one at the Priory," said she.

Emma looked and sighed.

"Rickworth must be in high glory. I know nothing prettier than the many-coloured woods sloping into the meadow, with the soft mist rising. You will find home beautiful."

"I cannot bear the thought of it," said Emma, in an under tone.

"How glad your little orphans will be! How many have you?"

"There are five."

Theodora saw she hated the subject, but thought it good for her, and went on to tell her of a case at Whitford, cramming the subject into her ear at first against the stomach of her sense; but it could not but exact attention, a widow sinking in a decline after sorrows which, by comparison, made all young lady troubles shrink into atoms. Emma became interested, and began to ask questions.

"You will go to see the mother? Poor thing, I hope she may be alive to hear of the prospect for her child. I am sorry to be unable to go and see her, and should be so glad to know you near and able to attend to her."

"We will write to the housekeeper," said Emma.

"Are you not going back yourself?"

"I don't know; I have no heart to think of it."

"Emma" said Theodora, "we need not go on as if we did not understand each other. Violet can attend to you now; I wish you would talk to her. No one can comfort as she can."

"I do not wish to tease her with my —"

"She knows, she longs to help you. Don't you know how fond of you she always was? You two appreciated each other from the first."

"It is of no use. She never entered into my views. She

does not understand. It is her situation I blame, not herself. She is a dear creature, and I once had a strong girlish enthusiasm for her."

"Once!" cried Theodora, "what has she ever done to lessen enthusiasm for all that is good and lovely?"

Emma hung her head, alarmed; and Theodora more gently insisted, till, by the power which in childhood she had exerted over Emma, she forced out an answer. "Forgive me, if I must tell you. I have thought her too fond of going out. It was no wonder, so very young as she was. I do not find fault, but it seemed to dispel an illusion that she was superior to other people. Don't you remember one party she would go to against warning, that one where she fainted? I could never feel the same for her afterwards."

Theodora was silent for a few seconds, then exclaimed, "O Violet, is there no end to the injuries I have done you? Emma, never judge without seeing behind the curtain. It was my fault. It was when I was crazed with wilfulness. Your mother offered to chaperon me, I was set on going with Mrs. Finch, and as the only means of preventing that, Violet sacrificed herself. I did not know she likewise sacrificed the friendship of the only person, except John, who had been kind to her."

"I wish Theresa had known this," said Emma.

"Now *you* know it, will you not turn to Violet for advice and comfort? I know what she can be. If you could guess what she saved me from, you would fly at once to her."

"I cannot begin now, I cannot look anywhere that recalls past happiness!" said Emma, murmuring low, as though the words, in spite of herself, broke from her oppressed heart. "Would that I could hide my head! Oh! that I had wings like a dove!"

"Emma, you have them. They may carry you into what seems to be a wilderness, but go bravely on, and you will be at rest at last."

"What do you mean?"

"The wings of duty."

"If I only knew where it was."

"Your mother, your dependents, your orphans, your beautiful old plan —"

Emma only groaned, and held up her hand in deprecation.

"I have felt it," continued Theodora. "I know how vain, and vapid, and weary everything seems, as if the sap of life was gone, but if we are content to remain in the wilderness, it begins to blossom at last, indeed it does."

"I thought you had had no troubles," said Emma, with more interest. "They could not have been such as mine."

"In one respect they were worse, for they were entirely my own fault."

"May I ask, is there no hope for you?"

"No," said Theodora, "I believe there is none. But a certain peaceful feeling, independent of that, came after the desolateness, and has never gone utterly away, though I have had to reap the harvest of the evil that I sowed. Oh! depend upon it, there is nothing like resolutely facing the day's work."

Emma made no answer; they had come to the gate of a villa, and Theodora thought she might as well have held her peace, since Theresa would undo the whole.

Miss Marstone was not within, but she had left a note for Miss Brandon. Emma, after reading it, timidly said that Theresa had gone to spend the day with a friend, who was boarding in a convent not far off, and that she wished her to come and make her visit to her there. Then timidly glancing towards her companion, she desired to be driven thither, but Theodora, leaning forward, said, in an authoritative manner, "Drive on two miles on the road. We will say where next when we come back."

"I beg your pardon," she said to Emma, "but this is not a step to be taken inconsiderately."

Emma did not reply; Theodora perceived that her decided manner had terrified her. "I am sorry if I was rude," she said; "I did not mean it, but I thought you were acting

precipitately, and that you would be glad to have time to reflect before going to this place without your mother's knowledge."

"It is not precipitately," said Emma, faintly.

"You don't mean that this was a pre-concerted scheme? If so, pray let me out, and I will go home alone."

"No, no, I did not mean exactly — don't use such words, Theodora. Only sister Mary Angela — Theresa's great friend — had joined the Roman communion. Theresa wished me to see her and the convent, and said that perhaps I might find her there. If I had told mamma, she would have fancied I should be kidnapped like young ladies in books. I believe you expect it yourself," said Emma, giggling hysterically.

"I think, and she thinks nothing but what is rational," said Theodora, coldly, "that it is a sad thing to see you taught to resort to subterfuges, and that they can lead into no safe course."

"You do not know Theresa, or you would not accuse her of what she would detest."

"I speak from what I see. She has arranged in secret that, without your mother's knowledge, you should by stealth go to a place, where you both know Lady Elizabeth would be shocked to hear of you."

"I thought you understood the true Catholic spirit," said Emma, "and were interested in these things."

"The Catholic spirit is anything but such treatment of a mother," said Theodora. "Once for all, do you mean to go to this place, or do you not? I see a cab, and if you go I return home in that."

"Of course then I must give it up."

"Now, and for ever, unless with your mother's consent, I hope," said Theodora.

Emma did not answer, and they proceeded for some distance, Theodora wondering what could be her companion's frame of mind, and what she ought to do next. So far, it was the sort of compulsion she had been wont to

employ in the unscrupulous hours of childhood; but this was no gain — Emma's reason ought to be convinced, and of this she had little hope. Miss Brandon was the first to break silence. That word subterfuge rankled, as it must in any honourable mind, and she began — "I wish you would do Theresa justice. No one can have a greater contempt than she for anything underhand."

Theodora tried not to laugh, and could not help pitying the fond affections that were blind to every fault in the beloved object.

"Ah!" said Emma, in answer to her silence, "you think this bears the appearance of it; but you may be certain that Theresa is absolutely sure to act conscientiously."

"Some people follow their conscience — some drive it."

"Now, do let me explain it," entreated Emma, and talking eagerly and rather mistily, she told in many more words than were needful how Theresa had serious doubts as to what she termed Anglicanism, reckoning against it every laxity in doctrine or in discipline that came to her knowledge, and admiring everything in other branches of the Church. Emma, taking all for granted that Theresa said, was strongly of the same mind, and while both made high professions of attachment to their own communion, they were in a course of dwelling on all the allurements held out in other quarters. By some astonishing train of reasoning, frequent in persons in a state of excitement and self-deception, they had persuaded themselves that Mark Gardner's return to his evil courses had been for want of a monastery to receive him; and their tendency to romance about conventual institutions had been exaggerated by the present state of Emma's spirits, which gave her a desire to retire from the world, as well as a distaste to the projects in which she had lately given her false lover but too large a share.

"Peace dwells in the cloister," she sighed.

"You have the essentials of such a life in your power," said Theodora.

"Not the fixed rule — the obedience."

"Oh! Emma! your mother!"

"I want discipline — Church discipline as in primitive times," said Emma, impatiently.

"The most primitive discipline of all is, 'honour thy father and mother,'" returned Theodora.

There was a silence. Theodora resumed — "I know how one would rather do anything than what is required. Violet taught me then that we must not choose our cross."

Another space, then Emma said, "And you call it a subterfuge?"

"Can you honestly call it otherwise? Don't bewilder us with explanations, but simply say what you would have thought of it six years ago."

For Emma not to send forth a vapour of words was impossible, but they did not satisfy even herself. Those short terse sentences of Theodora's told upon her, and at last she did not deny that she should not have thought it right if Theresa had not prompted it.

"Is she more likely to be right, or is the Catechism?"

"The Catechism?"

"To be *true* and just in all my dealings."

"She did not think it wrong."

"No, of course not, but if it is wrong, and she does not think it so, does that make her a safe guide?"

"You want to set me against her!"

"I want you to cease to give her a power over you, which is unsafe for any human being."

"You have been talking to mamma."

"I have been seeing how unhappy she is about you; but since I have talked to yourself I have seen far more danger."

"Poor mamma!"

"May I tell you how your history appears to a looker-on? I know it will be painful, but I think it will be good for you."

"Well!"

"You began beautifully. It was delightful to see how you and your mother went on in perfect confidence, ready to work at everything good together, and she sympathizing in

all your projects, only bringing wise caution to restrain your ardour."

"Yes, we were very happy then!" sighed Emma; "but mamma wished me to go into society."

"And wisely. Remember, in the conventual system, a girl cannot be a novice till she has had six months in which to see the world. It was right that you should count the cost. Besides, society in moderation is the best way to keep one's mind from growing narrow. Well, then, you met Miss Marstone, and she excited your imagination. She is really clever and good, and I don't wonder at your liking her; but I cannot think that she has done right in cultivating your exclusive preference till she has detached you from your mother."

"She did not always think with her."

"No, but a sound friend would always place the duty to your mother foremost. You made a Pope of her, believed all she said, did as she pleased, and she was flattered, and absorbed you more and more, till really you both came to treating Lady Elizabeth's opinion as a nonentity. Can you deny it?"

"No."

More would have been said, but Theodora would not hear, and went on. "See the consequence. She made a fearful mistake, and but for your mother and your remaining regard to her authority, where should you have been now? All this misery could not have been if you had been safe under Lady Elizabeth's wing."

"No!" faintly said Emma.

"And now, when your mother has saved you, and her heart is aching to comfort you, and take you back to the safe old nest where all your duties and schemes lie, Miss Marstone tries to keep you from her; and fancies she is doing the best and most conscientious thing by teaching you to elude her, and go where, to one in your state of mind, is temptation indeed. Oh! Emma, she may think it right; but are you acting kindly by the mother who has only you?"

Theodora was very glad to see tears. "I cannot bear to go home!" presently said Emma.

"Have you thought how badly all the poor people must be getting on without you? All your children — it is half a year since you saw them!"

Emma groaned.

"Yes, it is bad enough at first. You have had a heavy trial indeed, poor Emma; but what is a trial but something to try us? Would it not be more manful to face the pain of going home, and to take up your allotted work? Then you would be submitting, not to a self-made rule, but to Heaven's own appointment."

Was Emma's mind disengaged enough for curiosity, or did she want to quit the subject? She said — "You have had a trial of this kind yourself?"

Theodora had a struggle. To tell the whole seemed to her as uncalled for, as painful; and yet there must be reciprocity if there is to be confidence, and she could not bear to advise like one who had never erred. She, therefore, confessed how her happiness had been wrecked by her own fault, and related the subsequent misery; how Violet had repelled the disposition to exalt her rather than her parents, and had well nigh forced her abroad, and how there in the dreary waste, a well of peace had sprung up, and had been with her ever since.

Short as Theodora tried to make the story she so much disliked, it lasted till they were almost at home. It had its effect. To be thrown over upon Lady Martindale and Mrs. Nesbit at Baden could not but appear to Emma a worse lot than to be left to her own mother and Rickworth, which, after all, she loved so well; and the promise of peace to be won by following appointed paths was a refreshing sound.

She had, this whole time, never thought of her mother's feelings, and the real affection she entertained was once more awake. Besides, to see how Theodora represented their scheme, not only shook her faith in Theresa, but

alarmed her sense of right on her own account. In short, though she said no word, there was a warmth in her meeting with Lady Elizabeth, on their return, that gave Theodora hopes.

Next morning came a note.

"My dear Theodora, — I have decided to go home at once. I could not rest without Theresa's explanation, so I have written to her, and I had rather have it by letter than in person. I talked till two o'clock last night with mamma, and we go home at twelve to-day. Tell Violet we will come in for a few moments to take leave.

"Your affectionate,

"E. E. B."

"There is one thing to be thankful for!" said Theodora.

The visit was very short; Emma hardly spoke or raised her eyes, and Theodora hoped that some of her timidity arose from repentance for her false judgment of Violet. To Theodora, she said — "You shall see Theresa's explanation," and Theodora deserved credit for not saying it would be a curiosity.

Lady Elizabeth did as she had not done since Theodora was a little child; she put her arm round her neck and kissed her affectionately; murmuring, "Thank you, my dear."

This little scene seemed to brace Theodora for the trial of the evening. Percy had offered to sit up that night with Arthur, and she had to receive him, and wait with him in the drawing-room till he should be summoned. It was a hard thing to see him so distant and reserved, and the mere awkwardness was unpleasant enough. She could devise nothing to say that did not touch on old times, and he sat engrossed with a book, the reviewal of which was to be his night's employment.

CHAPTER XIII.

Should this new-blossomed hope be coldly nipped,
Then were I desolate indeed.
Philip van Artevelde — H. TAYLOR.

THE night was apt to be the worst time with Arthur; and Violet generally found him in the morning in a state of feverish discomfort and despondency that was not easily soothed. Anxious to know how he had fared with his new attendant, she came in as early as possible, and was rejoiced to find that he had passed an unusually comfortable night, had been interested and cheered by Percy's conversation, and had slept some hours.

Percy's occupation, in the mean time, was shown by some sheets of manuscript on the table near the fire.

"I see you have not been losing time," said Violet.

"I fear — I fear I have," he answered, as rather nervously he began to gather up some abortive commencements and throw them into the fire.

"Take care, that is mine," exclaimed she, seeing the words "Mrs. Martindale," and thinking he had seized upon a letter which he had written to her from Worthbourne on Arthur's business. She held out her hand for it, and he yielded it, but the next moment she saw it was freshly written; before she could speak she heard the door closed, and Arthur sleepily muttered, "Gone already." Dreading some new branch of the Boulogne affair, she sat down, and with a beating heart read by the firelight: —

"I can bear it no longer! Long ago I committed one great folly, and should have been guilty of a greater, if you had not judged more wisely for me than I for myself. You did, indeed, act 'kindly as ever;' and I have thanked you for it a thousand times, since I came to my senses in the dismal altitude of my *sixième étage* at Paris.

"No disrespect to your sister, to whom I did greater injustice than I knew, in asking her to seal my mistake. I threw away a rough diamond because its sharp edges scratched my fingers, and, in my fit of passion, tried to fill

up its place with another jewel. Happily you and she knew better! Now I see the diamond sparkling, refined, transcendent, with such chastened lustre as even I scarce dared to expect!

"These solitary years of disappointment have brought me to a sense of the harshness and arrogance of my dealings with the high nature that had so generously entrusted itself to me. There was presumption from the first in undertaking to mould her, rudeness in my attempts to control her, and precipitate passion and jealousy in resenting the displeasure I had provoked; and all was crowned by the absurd notion that pique with her was love of your sister!

"I see it all now, or rather I have seen it ever since it was too late; I have brooded over it till I have been half distracted, night after night! And now I can hardly speak, or raise my head in her presence. I must have her pardon, whether I dare or not to ask one thing more. I never was sure that her heart was mine; my conduct did not deserve it, whatever my feelings did. If she accepted me from romance, I did enough to open her eyes! I am told she accepts Lord St. Erme—fit retribution on me, who used to look down on him in my arrogant folly, and have to own that he has merited her, while I —

"But, at least, I trust to your goodness to obtain some word of forgiveness for me without disturbing her peace of mind. I would not expose her to one distressing scene! She has gone through a great deal, and the traces of grief and care on that noble countenance almost break my heart. I would not give her the useless pain of having to reject me, and of perceiving the pain I should not be able to conceal.

"I commit myself to your kindness, then, and entreat of you, if the feeling for me was a delusion, or if it is extinct, to let me know in the manner least painful to you; and, when she can endure the subject, to tell her how bitterly I have repented of having tried to force humility on her, when I stood in still greater need of the lesson, and of having flown off in anger when she revolted at my dictation. One word of

forgiveness would be solace in a life of deserved loneliness and disappointment."

Trembling with gladness, Violet could hardly refrain from rousing Arthur to hear the good news! She hastily wrote the word "Try!" twisted it into a note, and sent it down in case Mr. Fotheringham should still be in the house. The missive returned not, and she sat down to enjoy her gladness as a Sunday morning's gift.

For Violet, though weak, anxious, and overworked, was capable of receiving and being cheered by each sunbeam that shone on herself or on her loved ones. Perhaps it was the reward of her resignation and trust, that even the participation (as it might almost be called) of her husband's suffering, and the constantly hearing his despondence, could not deprive her of her hopefulness. Ever since the first two days she had been buoyed up by a persuasion of his recovery, which found food in each token of improvement; and, above all, there was something in Arthur that relieved the secret burden that had so long oppressed her.

She was free to receive solace and rejoice in the joy of others; and when Theodora met her in the morning, eye and lip were beaming with a suppressed smile of congratulation, that hardly suited with the thin, white face.

"Arthur's comfortable night has done you both good," said Theodora. "Percy is a better nurse than I."

"Oh, yes! it is all Percy's doing!" said Violet, there checking herself; but laughing and blushing, so that for a moment she looked quite girlishly pretty.

No more was heard of Mr. Fotheringham till Johnnie came home from the afternoon's service, and reported that the owl-man was in the drawing-room with Aunt Theodora.

At church Johnnie had seen his papa's good-natured friend in the aisle, and, with his hand on the door of the seat and his engaging face lifted up, had invited him in.

Innocent Johnnie! he little knew what tumultuous thoughts were set whirling through his aunt's mind. The last time Percy had joined her at church, the whole time of

the service had been spent in the conflict between pride and affection. Now, there was shame for this fresh swarm of long forgotten sins, and as the recollection saddened her voice in the confession, foremost was the sense of sacrilege in having there cherished them, and turned her prayer into sin. No wonder she had been for a time yielded up to her pride and self-will!

As silently as usual they walked home from church, and she would at once have gone upstairs, but he said, in a low, hoarse voice, as her foot was on the step, "May I speak to you?"

She turned. It was so strangely like that former occasion that she had a curious, bewildered feeling of having passed through the same before; and perhaps she had, in her dreams. Scarcely conscious, she walked towards the fire.

"Can you forgive me?" said the same husky voice.

She raised her eyes to his face. "Oh, Percy!" — but she could say no more, cut short by rising sobs; and she could only hide her face, and burst into tears.

He was perfectly overwhelmed. "Theodora, dearest! do not! I have been too hasty," he exclaimed, almost beside himself with distress, and calling her by every affectionate name.

"Never mind! It is only because I have become such a poor creature!" said she, looking up with a smile, lost the next moment in the uncontrollable weeping.

"It is my fault! — my want of consideration. I will go — I will call Mrs. Martindale!"

"No, no; don't, don't go!" said Theodora, eagerly — her tears driven back. "It was only that I am so foolish now."

"It was very wrong to be so abrupt —"

"No! Oh! it was the relief!" said Theodora, throwing off her shawl, as if to free herself from oppression. Percy took it from her, placed her in the arm-chair, and rendered her all the little attentions in his power with a sort of trem-

bling eagerness, still silent; for she was very much exhausted, — not so much from present agitation as from the previous strain on mind and body.

It seemed to give a softness and tenderness to their reunion, such as there never had been between them before, as she leant back on the cushions he placed for her, and gazed up in his face as he stood by her, while she rested, as if unwilling to disturb the peace and tranquillity.

At last she said, "Did I hear you say you had forgiven me?"

"I asked if you could forgive me!"

"I!" — she exclaimed, rousing herself and sitting up, — "I have nothing to forgive! What are you thinking of?"

"And is it thus you overlook the presumption and harshness that — "

"Hush!" said Theodora; "I was unbearable. No man of sense or spirit could be expected to endure such treatment. But, Percy, I have been very unhappy about it, and I do hope I am tamer at last, if you will try me again."

"Theodora!" cried Percy, hardly knowing what he said. "Can you mean it? After all that is past, may I believe what I dared not feel assured of even in former days?"

"Did you not?" said Theodora, sorrowfully. "Then my pride must have been even worse than I supposed."

"Only let me hear the word from you. You do not know what it would be to me."

"And did you really think I did not care for you? I, whose affection for you has been a part of my very self! I am more grieved than ever. I would never have tormented you if I had not thought you knew my heart was right all the time."

"It was my fault; my anger and impatience! And you let me hope that this — this undeserved feeling has survived even my usage!"

"Nay, it was that which taught me its power. Your rejection was the making of me; thanks to Violet, who would not let me harden myself, and ruin all."

"Violet! I could almost call her our presiding spirit, sent to save us from ourselves!"

"Dear Violet! how glad she will be."

"Then," said Percy, as if he had only room for one thought, "are we indeed to begin anew?"

"I will try to be less unbearable," was the stifled answer.

"We have both had lessons enough to teach us to be more humble and forbearing," said Percy, now first venturing to take her hand. "Let us hope that since this blessing has been granted us, that we shall be aided in our endeavours to help each other."

There was a grave and chastened tone about the meeting of these two lovers: Theodora almost terrified at realizing that the bliss she had once forfeited was restored to her, and Percy peculiarly respectful — almost diffident in manner, feeling even more guilty towards her than she did towards him. Neither could be content without a full confession of their wrongs towards each other, and the unjust impressions that had actuated them; and in the retrospect, time passed so quickly away, that they were taken by surprise when the candles came in.

"I need not go?" entreated Percy.

"No, indeed; but you have had no dinner."

"Never mind — I want nothing."

Theodora ran upstairs. Violet understood the suppressed call in the dressing-room, and met her with outstretched ar m.

The children never forgot that evening, so delightful did the owl-man make himself. Helen even offered him a kiss, and wished him good night, saucily calling him Percy; and Johnnie set his aunt's cheeks in a glow by saying, "It ought to be Uncle Percy, if he belonged to Aunt Helen."

"What do you know of Aunt Helen?" said Percy, lifting him on his knee, with a sudden change of manner.

Johnnie's face was deeply tinged; he bent down his head and did not answer, till, when the inquiry was repeated, he whispered, "Mamma said Aunt Helen was so very good.

Mamma read to me about the dew-drops, in her written book. She told me about her, when I had the blister on, because, she said, her thoughts helped one to be patient and good."

Percy put his arm round him, and this sigh or movement surprised Johnnie, who uneasily looked at his aunt. "Ought I not to have said it?"

"Yes, indeed, Johnnie boy. There is nothing so pleasant to me to hear," said Percy. "Good night; I shall like you all the better for caring for my dear sister Helen.

"Being dead, she yet speaketh," murmured he, as the children went. "Strange how one such tranquil, hidden life, which seemed lost and wasted, has told and is telling on so many."

Even the peace and happiness of that evening could not remove the effects of over-fatigue; and Percy insisted on Theodora's going early to rest, undertaking again to watch by Arthur. She objected, that he had been up all last night.

"I cannot go home to bed! If you sent me away, I should wander in the Square, apostrophizing the gas-lamps, and be found to-morrow in the station, as a disorderly character. You had better make my superfluous energies available in Arthur's service. Ask if I may come in."

Theodora thought the sick room had acquired quite a new aspect. A Sunday air pervaded the whole, seeming to radiate from Violet, as she sat by the fire; the baby asleep, in his little, pink-lined cradle, by her side. The patient himself partook of the freshened appearance, as the bright glow of firelight played over his white pillows, his hair, smooth and shining, and his face where repose and cheerfulness had taken the place of the worn, harassed expression of suffering.

Of the welcome there could be no doubt. Arthur's hands were both held out, and did not let her go, after they had drawn her down to kiss him and sit beside him on the bed.

"Well done! Theodora," he said; "I am glad it is made up. He is the best fellow living, and well you deserve —"

"O, don't say so!"

"Not that he is the best," said Arthur, squeezing hard both her hands, as he used to do in fond, teasing schoolboy days. "I shall not say one without the other. Such a pair is not to be found in a hurry. You only wanted breaking-in to be first-rate, and now you have done it."

"No, it was your own dear little wife!" was whispered in his ear. He pinched her again, and, still holding her fast, said, "Is Percy there? Come in;" and, as he entered, "Percy, I once warned you to kill the cat on the wedding-day. I testify that she is dead. This sister of mine is a good girl now. Ask Violet."

"Violet — or, rather, our Heartsease" — said Percy, as his grasp nearly crushed Violet's soft fingers: "thank you: yours was the most admirable note ever composed! Never was more perfect *eloquence du billet!*"

"Eh! What was it?"

Percy held up the little note before Arthur's eyes; he laughed. "Ay! Violet is the only woman I ever knew who never said more than was to the purpose. But now, Mrs. Heartsease, if that is your name, go and put Theodora to bed; Percy will stay with me."

"The baby," objected Violet.

"Never mind, I want you very much," said Theodora; "and as Percy says he has so much superfluous energy, he can take care of two Arthurs at once. I am only afraid of his making the great one talk."

"The great one," was at first as silent as the little one; his countenance became very grave and thoughtful; and at last he said, "Now, Percy, you must consent to my selling out, and paying you."

"If you do, it must be share and share alike with the rest of the creditors."

"And that would be no good," said Arthur, "with all the harpies to share. I wish you would consent, Percy! Think what it is to me to lie here, feeling that I have ruined not only myself, but all my sister's hopes of happiness."

"Nay, you have been the means of bringing us together again. And as to your wife —"

"I must not have her good deeds reckoned to me," said Arthur, sadly. "But what can you do? My father cannot pay down Theodora's fortune."

"We must wait," interrupted Percy, cheerfully.

Arthur proceeded. "Wait! what for? Now, you are cut out of Worthbourne, and my aunt's money might as well be at the bottom of the sea, and —"

"I can hear no croaking on such a day as this," broke in Percy. "As to Worthbourne, it is ill waiting for dead men's shoon. I always thought Pelham's as good a life as my own, and I never fancied Mrs. Nesbit's hoards. If I made three thousand pounds in five years, why may I not do so again? I 'll turn rapacious — give away no more articles to benighted editors on their last legs. I can finish off my Byzantine history and coin it into bezants."

"And these were your hard-earned savings, that should have forwarded your marriage!"

"They have," said Percy, smiling. "They will come back some way or other. I shall work with a will now! I am twice the man I was yesterday. It was heartless work before. Now, 'some achieve greatness,' you know."

Arthur would have said more, but Percy stopped him. "If you gave it me to-morrow, we could not marry on it. Let things alone till you are about again, and John comes home. Meantime, trust her and me for being happy. A fico for the world and worldling's base."

He attained his object in making Arthur smile; and Violet presently returning, they sat on opposite sides of the fire, and held one of the happiest conversations of their lives. Violet told the whole story of the fire, which seemed as new to Arthur as to Percy.

"Why did I never hear this before?" he asked.

"You heard it at the time," said Violet.

Recollections came across Arthur, and he turned away his head, self-convicted of having thought the women made a

tedious history, and that he could not be bored by attending. Percy's way of listening, meanwhile, was with his foot on the fender, his elbow on his knee, his chin resting on his hand, his bright gray eyes fixed full on Violet, with a beaming look of gladness, and now and then a nod of assent, as if no heroism on Theodora's part could surpass his expectations, for he could have told it all beforehand. However, his turn came, when Violet described her last expedition after the chess-board, and the injury it had entailed.

"Now, now; you don't say so!" said he, stammering with eagerness, and starting up.

"Poor dear, she hardly knew what she did," said Violet.

"I remember," said Arthur. "That was the time of the delusion that Percy had taken up with his present cousin-in-law."

Violet blushed. She was too much ashamed of ever having had the idea to bear to recall it; and when Arthur explained, Percy shuddered, and exclaimed, "No, I thank you. Violet! you knew enough against me; but you need not have thought me quite come to that!"

On the morrow, Percy came in as the children's lessons were concluded. He studied Theodora's face tenderly, and hoped that she had rested. She laughed, and called herself perfectly well; and, indeed, her eyes were as large and as bright as they ought to be, and she had discovered, that morning, that her black locks would make a much more respectable show if properly managed. He would not have mistaken her if she had looked as she did now three weeks ago.

After they had talked for some time, Theodora said, "We must not talk away the whole morning; I must write to papa."

"Yes," said Percy, "I came to speak of that. 'Theodora, perhaps it was wrong to say what I did last night."

"How?" said she, frightened.

"You ought to have been told how much worse my position is than before."

"Oh! is that all?"

"It is a very serious all," he answered. "When I spoke before, and was cool enough to treat it as if I was conferring a favour on you, it was wonderful that your father consented. Now, you see, Worthbourne is gone —"

"How can you care for that?"

"I did not, till I began to look at it from your father's point of view. Besides, I ought to tell you, that there is no chance even of a legacy. I find that Mrs. Fotheringham rules the house, and has tried to prejudice my uncle against me. On the marriage, there were fresh arrangements; my uncle was to alter his will, and it was on that occasion that Sir Antony sent for me to keep up the balance, and save him from her influence. Mrs. Martindale was right about her. What a mischief-maker she is! My delay gave great offence."

"Your delay on Arthur's account?"

"Yes; she managed to turn it against me. Imagine her having persuaded them that I reckoned on Pelham's being set aside to make room for me. She says it was named in this house!"

"Yes, by Jane herself."

"She represented me as so disgusted at the marriage that I would pay no attention to Sir Antony. I saw how it was when she received me, purring and coaxing, and seeming to be making my peace with my uncle. By and by, Pelham, when we grew intimate again, blundered out the whole, — that his father wished to have settled something on me; but that Jane had persuaded him that the whole might be wanted as a provision for their family. I cared not one rush then, but it makes a difference now. As for my former line, I am forgotten or worse. I have said blunt things that there was no call for me to say. No one chooses to have me for an underling, and there is no more chance of my getting an appointment than of being made Khan of Tartary. Authorship is all that is left to me."

"You have done great things in that way," said Theodora.

"I had made something, but I was obliged to advance it the other day to get Arthur out of this scrape, and there is no chance of his being able to pay it, poor fellow!"

"Oh, Percy! thank you more for this than for all. If the pressure had come, I believe it would have killed him. If you had seen the misery of those days!"

"And now," continued Percy, "poor Arthur is most anxious it should be paid; but I ought not to consent. If he were to sell out now, he would be almost destitute. I have persuaded him to let all rest in silence till John comes."

"I am glad you have," said Theodora. "I am afraid papa is a good deal pressed for money. The rents have had to be reduced; and John wants all the Barbuda income to spend on the estate there. Even before the fire, papa talked of bringing John home to cut off the entail, and sell some land; and the house was insured far short of its value. He wants to get rid of Armstrong and all the finery of the garden; but he is afraid of vexing mamma, and in the mean time he is very glad that we are living more cheaply in the cottage. I really do not think he could conveniently pay such a sum; and just at present, too, I had rather poor Arthur's faults were not brought before him."

"It comes to this, then; — Is it for your happiness to enter upon an indefinite engagement, and wait for the chance of my working myself up into such a competency as may make our marriage not too imprudent? It cannot, as far as I can see, be for years; it may be never."

"When I thought you would not have me, I meant to be an old maid," said Theodora; "and Percy, this time you shall not think I do not care for you. If we have to wait for our whole lives, let it be with the knowledge that we belong to each other. I could not give up that now, and" — as he pressed her hand — "mind, I am old enough to be trusted to choose poverty. I know I can live on a little: I trust to you to tell me whenever there is enough."

"And your father?"

"He will not object — he will rejoice. The way I regarded

that dear father was one of the worst sins of that time! It is better it should be as it is. Mamma could not well do without me now; I should be in doubt about leaving her, even if the rest were plain. So that is trouble saved," she added with a smile.

"If they will see it in the same light! If they will forgive as readily as you do one of the greatest injuries to a young lady."

"Hush — nonsense. Papa always considered that it served me right. And really this is such perfect content, that I do not know how to understand it. You had always the power of reconciliation in your hands; but, you know, I had not; and, apart from all other feelings, the mere craving for pardon was so painful! It was only yesterday morning that I was thinking it might, at least, come in the other world."

"The pardon I was begging Violet to seek for me! — I trusted to obtain that, though I little hoped —"

"But indeed, Percy, we must write our letters, or the children will be upon us again."

Her letter was more easily written than Percy's. He wrote, and tore up, and considered, and talked to her, and wished John was at home, and said that Lord Martindale would be perfectly justified in withdrawing his consent, and declaring him a presumptuous wretch.

"What! when you have rescued his son? No, indeed, papa knows you too well! I have no fears: for though he is not aware of the cost of what you did for Arthur, he is most grateful for what he does know of; he thinks you saved his life, and even without that, he is too kind to me to do what — I could not bear."

"I will try to believe you."

"I was thinking that this is just retribution on me, that whereas I led Arthur into temptation, this debt should be the obstacle."

Perhaps nothing gratified him more than to hear her speak of the loan as if she participated in the loss, not as if

she viewed it from the Martindale side of the question, and felt it too much of an obligation.

His letter was not written till just in time for the post, and it travelled in the same cover with hers. Till the answer arrived he was very anxious, came little to the house, and only put on his cheerful air before Arthur, whose spirits could not afford to be lowered. Theodora was secure. She knew that she deserved that there should be difficulties; but at the same time she had the sense that the tide had turned. Pardon had come, and with it hope; and though she tried to school herself to submit to disappointment, she could not expect it. She knew she might trust to her father's kind unworldly temper and sense of justice, now that he was left to himself. And when the letter came, Percy brought it in triumph under the shade of the old green umbrella, which hitherto he had not dared to produce.

Lord Martindale said everything affectionate and cordial. If he grieved at the unpromising prospect, he was wise enough to know it was too late to try to thwart an attachment which had survived such shocks; and he only dwelt on his rejoicing that, after all her trials, his daughter should have merited the restoration of the affection of one whom he esteemed so highly.

He fully forgave the former rejection, and declared that it was with far more hope and confidence of their happiness that he now accorded his sanction than when last it had been asked; and the terms in which he spoke of his daughter seemed to deepen her humility by the strength of their commendation.

Happy days succeeded; the lodgings in Piccadilly were nearly deserted. Percy was always either nursing Arthur, playing with the children, or bringing sheets of Byzantine history for revision; and he was much slower in looking over Theodora's copies of them than in writing them himself. There was much grave quiet talk between the lovers when alone together. They were much altered since the time when their chief satisfaction seemed to lie in teasing and triumph-

ing over one another; past troubles and vague prospects had a sobering influence; and they felt that while they enjoyed their present union as an unlooked-for blessing, it might be only a resting point before a long period of trial, separation, and disappointment. It gave a resigned tone to their happiness, even while its uncertainty rendered it more precious.

All mirthfulness, except what the children called forth, was reserved for Arthur's room; but he thought Percy as gay and light-hearted as ever, and his sister not much less so. Percy would not bring their anxieties to depress the fluctuating spirits, which, wearied with the sameness of a sick room, varied with every change of weather, every sensation of the hour.

Theodora almost wondered at Percy's talking away every desponding fit of Arthur's, whether about his health, his money matters, or their hopes. She said, though it was most trying to hear him talk of never coming down again, of not living to see the children grow up, and never allowing that he felt better, that she thought, considering how much depended on the impression now made, it might be false kindness to talk away his low spirits. Were they not repentance? Perhaps Percy was right, but she should not have dared to do so.

"Theodora, you do not know the difference between reflection and dejection. Arthur's repentance is too deep a thing for surface talk. It does not depend on my making him laugh or not."

"If anxiety about himself keeps it up —"

"If I let him believe that I do not think he will recover, for the sake of encouraging his repentance, I should be leaving him in a delusion, and that I have no right to do. Better let him feel himself repenting as having to redeem what is past, than merely out of terror, thinking the temptations have given him up, not that he gives them up. Why, when he told me to sell his saddle horses the other day, and that he should never ride again, it was nothing, and I only roused him up to hope to be out in the spring. Then he began

to lament over his beautiful mare, — but when it came to his saying he had sacrificed Violet's drives for her, and that he had been a selfish wretch, who never deserved to mount a horse again, and ending with a deep sigh, and 'Let her go, I ought to give her up,' there was reality and sincerity, and I acted on it. No, if Arthur comes out of his room a changed character, it must be by strengthening his resolution, not by weakening his mind, by letting him give way to the mere depression of illness."

"You believe the change real? Oh, you don't know what the doubt is to me! after my share in the evil, the anxiety is doubly intense! and I cannot see much demonstration except in his sadness, which you call bodily weakness."

"We cannot pry into hidden things," Percy answered. "Watch his wife, and you will see that she is satisfied. You may trust him to her, and to Him in whose hands he is. Of this I am sure, that there is a patient consideration for others, and readiness to make sacrifices that are not like what he used to be. You are not satisfied? It is not as *you* would repent; but you must remember that Arthur's is after all a boy's character; he has felt his errors as acutely as I think he can feel them, and if he is turning from them, that is all we can justly expect. They were more weakness than wilfulness."

"Not like mine!" said Theodora; "but one thing more, Percy — Can it be right for him to see no clergyman?"

"Wait," said Percy again. "Violet can judge and influence him better than you or I. Depend upon it, she will do the right thing at the right time. Letting him alone to learn from his children seems to me the safest course."

Theodora acquiesced, somewhat comforted by the conversation, though it was one of those matters, in which the most loving heart must submit to uncertainty, in patient hope and prayer.

Just before Christmas, Theodora was summoned home; for her mother was too unwell and dispirited to do without her any longer. Her father offered to come and take her

place, but Arthur and Violet decided that it would be a pity to unsettle him from home again. Arthur was now able to sit up for some hours each day, and Percy undertook to be always at hand. He was invited to Brogden for Christmas; but it was agreed between him and Theodora that they must deny themselves the pleasure of spending it together; they thought it unfit to leave Violet even for a few days entirely unassisted.

Mr. Hugh Martindale came to fetch Theodora home. He brought a more satisfactory account of poor Emma, who had never forwarded the promised explanation to Theodora. Lady Elizabeth had applied to him to clear Emma's mind from some of the doubts and difficulties inspired by her friend, and at present, though her spirits were very low, they considered that one great step had been gained, for she had ceased every day to write to Miss Marstone.

Theodora had fixed many hopes on her cousin's interview with Arthur, but they only talked of Brogden news; however, she heard afterwards that Hugh was well satisfied with what he had seen of him, and that he thought Percy's view the safest. It was better to force nothing upon him. It was a sad struggle to resolve to depart, but it was made in thankfulness, when Theodora remembered the feelings with which she had entered that house. She went up in the early morning to wish Arthur good bye. He raised himself and embraced her fondly.

"Thank you, Theodora," he said; "you have been a good sister to me."

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" as the dark remembrance came, but he did not perceive it.

"I have been an ungrateful wretch, but I never understood it till lately," said he again. "The fire, — those children —"

"Hush, hush! you are hurting yourself," for he was choked with excess of feeling.

"I can't say more; — but, oh! if I could help keeping you from happiness!" and he was here overpowered by

cough and emotion so much as to alarm her, and she was forced to keep silence, and only kiss him again. He returned it with a squeeze of the hand and a look of affection. He had never given her such an one in the days when she deemed his love a thing exclusively her own; she had now gained something far better than his heart had then to offer. The best spot in it then had nothing half so deep, fond, and unselfish as what he gave her now.

She had ceased her wilful struggle, and besides all the rest, even this was added unto her.

CHAPTER XIV.

A calm stream flowing with a muddy one,
Till, in its onward current, it absorbs
With swifter movement and in purer light
The vexed eddies of its wayward brother,
A leaning and upbearing parasite,
Clothing the stem, which else had fallen quite.
Shadow forth thee; the world hath not another
Of such refined and chastened purity.

TENNYSON.

PATIENCE and prayer brought their fruit in due season.

"Violet, you will not be able to go to church on Christmas-day."

"No, I am not strong enough, even if you could spare me."

"Do you think Mr. Rivers could come to us?"

"O, thank you!"

Those were the words, but the flush that gave colour to Arthur's face showed the effort which they cost, and his wife's brief answer was cut short by the sweetest tears she had ever shed.

She wrote a note to the clergyman, which was answered by a call the same afternoon. It took Arthur by surprise; but his mind was made up, and colouring deeply, he desired that Mr. Rivers should be shown up. Violet left them alone together, her heart throbbing with grateful hope and supplication.

Arthur's honest though faltering avowal, "I have never thought enough of these things," was his whole history.

It had been grace missed and neglected, rather than wilfully abused. There had of course been opportunities, but there had been little culture or guidance in his early days; his confirmation had taken place as a matter of form, and he had never been a communicant; withheld at once by ignorance and dread of strictness, as well as by a species of awe. Even his better and more conscientious feelings had been aroused merely by his affections instead of by the higher sense of duty; and now it was through these that the true voice had at length reached him.

He had learnt more from his little boy's devotions than all the years of his life had taught him. The ever present influence under which his wife and that child lived and acted, impressed itself on him as a truth and reality, and the consciousness of his full responsibility dawned upon him. In the early part of his illness, his despair had been at the thought of his failures as husband, father, and son. Now there came on him the perception that not merely in his human relations had he transgressed, but that far more had he slighted the Almighty and Long-suffering Father. He looked back on his life of disregard, his dire offences —

Thus awakened, he watched each word from his little unconscious teacher, to gather from them clearer hopes of mercy and pardon. Happily, Johnnie, in his daily lessons, was going through the ground-work, and those words of mighty signification conveyed meanings to the father, which the innocent child had as yet no need to unfold. The long silent hours gave time for thought, and often when the watchers deemed that the stifled groan or restless movement arose from pain or oppression, it was in fact drawn forth by the weight on his mind.

So it had gone on; while mingled feelings of shame, reserve, and reluctance to show himself in a new light, kept his lips closed, and days and weeks passed before he brought himself to speak the word even to his wife. When

it was spoken, her silent intense gladness was at once a reward and a rebuke. Though she scarcely spoke, he knew her well enough to perceive more perfect joy than even at the moment when she first made him smile on their first-born son.

He raised his eyes to meet that look again, when, after his interview with the clergyman, she came back to join in fixing the hour. Contrition, dread, shame, penitence, all seemed to be soothed, and yet rendered deeper, by meeting those eyes of serene and perfect content and thankfulness.

That evening Johnnie was turning over prints by his side.

"There is the Good Shepherd, Papa. Do you see the poor sheep, who wandered out of the fold, away into the wilderness among the rocks and deserts — that is doing wrong, you know, Papa. And it lost its way, and the wolf was watching to tear it to pieces, that is Satan; but the Good Shepherd," and the child bent his head reverently, "He went after it. Mamma said that means that He touches our hearts and makes us sorry, and it looked up and was ready — as we pray to be made good again. So then He laid it on His shoulders, and carried it safe home to be happy in the fold again. Is He not very good, Papa? And only think! There is joy among the Holy Angels in Heaven when one sinner grieves and comes back."

Johnnie was wont to go on in this dreamy way without expecting an answer; but he was startled to see his father's face hidden by the shadowy fingers that propped his forehead.

"Has it made your head ache, Papa? Must I go away?"

"Say that again, Johnnie."

"I cannot say it quite right," answered the boy; "I only know it says that the Angels in Heaven rejoice and are glad over one sinner that repenteth. I thought about it that night after I had been naughty."

"You, Johnnie?" Arthur could hardly believe that child capable of a fault.

"Yes," said Johnnie, with a trembling lip; "I was cross

at doing my lessons with Aunt Theodora instead of mamma, and I was so sorry. But at night, something seemed to bring that verse, and I thought the Angels must have faces like mamma."

Certainly his father thought so too.

Theodora's Christmas morning was cheered by a letter from Percy, to tell her that he was to be with Arthur and Violet on this occasion. It was greater happiness to her than it would even have been to have had him at Brogden.

It was a very quiet day in Cadogan-place. The full freshness of awe and reverence was upon Arthur, and though he hardly spoke, and made almost no demonstration, the strength of his feeling was attested by the fatigue that ensued, partly perhaps, from the unwonted effort of fixing his attention. All the rest of the day he lay on the sofa, silent and dozing, till in the evening, when left alone with Johnnie, he only roused himself to ask to have a Bible placed within his reach, and there losing his way in searching for the parable of the strayed sheep, he wandered about in the sayings of St. John's Gospel.

Johnnie's delight had been the dressing the cathedral cup with a spray of holly sent to him from Brogden by his aunt, and now he sat conning the hymns he had heard in church, and musing over his prints in silence, till his brow caught an expression that strangely blended with those dreamy impressions of his father.

"Poor children! they have had a dull Christmas-day!" said Arthur, as they came to bid him good-night.

"No, no, Papa; the owl-man has had such a game at play with us in the dining-room!" cried Helen.

"Yes," said Johnnie; "and you know, Papa, I never said my hymn to you on a Christmas-day before. I like to-day the best of all I remember."

The next day he was glad to find that Johnnie would, after all, have his share of the festivities of the season. Colonel Harrington came to see Arthur, and begged to have his little godson at a New Year's party at his house.

Violet was perplexed. She could not send her little shy boy alone; yet she did not like to let his father know that it had been a mistake to accept the invitation. Percy came to her aid. "There is no such fun as a children's party. I wish you would smuggle me in as Johnnie's nursery governess."

"You know Mrs. Harrington, don't you?" said Arthur; "as a general rule, you know every one, and every one knows you."

"Yes, I know her. Come, Violet, can't you get me in in Johnnie's train? If you will let me take charge of him, I will keep an eye over the cake, and you shall see how I will muffle him up to come home."

It was too good an offer to be refused, though Violet had doubts whether it would be perfect happiness, for Johnnie was apt to shrink from strange children, and was unusually shy and timid. However, his spirits had risen of late. Ever since he had found his place in his father's heart, the drooping unchildlike sadness had passed away, and though still grave and thoughtful, there was a life and animation about him at times that cheered and delighted her.

There was a great friendship between him and "uncle Percy;" they took walks together, fed the ducks in St. James's Park, had many interesting conversations on Brogden affairs, and Johnnie had been several times at the rooms over the toy-shop, and was on intimate terms with old Puss. Violet knew that he would be safe, and was willing to think it right he should be made more of a man.

She felt her Johnnie's value more than ever that evening, when she saw how his father missed him. After the pleasure of seeing him ready to set off, looking so fair and bright and delicate, Arthur flagged very much.

It had been a trying day. The experiment of a more strengthening diet had resulted in heightened pulse and increased cough, and the medical men had been obliged to own that though the acute inflammation had been subdued, the original evil still remained, and that he was farther from complete recovery than they had lately been hoping.

Besides, he had sent in his claim on Mr. Gardner, on hearing of his marriage, and the answer, now due, did not come.

Nothing but the company of the children seemed likely to divert his thoughts, and Helen was too much for him. She was exalted at her own magnanimity in rejoicing that Johnnie should have the treat without her, and was in a boisterous state that led to an edict of banishment, vehemently resisted. It was the first time that anything had gone wrong in Arthur's presence, and Violet was much concerned, and fearful of the effect, when, after the conquest had been achieved, she left Helen sobbing in the nursery, and came down to his room.

There was not the annoyance she had dreaded; but the dejection had been deepened, and he did not respond to the somewhat forced cheerfulness with which she tried to speak of the generosity united in Helen with a hasty temper. It seemed to hurt and pain him so much to have the little girl punished, that there was nothing to be done but to try to turn away his attention.

Those weary times were perhaps harder to bear than periods of more evident trial and excitement. Violet, as she strove to rally her spirits and sustain his, could not help so feeling it — and then she thought of Helen Fotheringham, and recollected that she had been intending to read to Arthur an affectionate letter she had received from his brother on hearing of his illness. Arthur was greatly touched by the tone in which he was mentioned in it, and began eagerly to talk over John's many proofs of affection, among which he now ranked his disregarded warnings.

"I have not forgotten his saying I must make you happy. I little understood him then!"

There was happiness enough in the caress that would fain have silenced him.

"Well! I have been thinking! Our marriage was the best and worst thing I ever did. It was unjust to you, and as bad as possible towards them; but that is what I can't be

as sorry for as it deserves," and he looked up with a sweet smile, fading at once — "except when I look at you and the children, and think what is to become of you."

"Oh, don't, dear Arthur! Why look forward? There has been great mercy so far. Let us rest in it."

"You may; it was not your fault," said Arthur; "but how can I? I took you in your ignorance: I let your father deceive himself about my expectations; then, when my own people were far kinder to me than I deserved, and I ought to have done everything myself to make up for my imprudence, I go and let you pinch yourself, while I squander everything on my own abominable follies! And now, here am I leaving you with all these poor children, and nothing on earth — nothing but a huge debt! What are you to do, I say?"

He was almost angry that she did not partake his apprehension for her welfare.

"This is only a casual drawback. Dr. L— said so!"

"That 's nothing to the purpose. My health is done for. There is nothing before me but decline. I have felt that all along, whatever doctors may say. And how can you expect me not to feel what I have brought on you?"

"I am sure you need not be afraid for us. Is it not unkind to doubt your father and John?"

"Suppose they should die before Johnnie comes of age — suppose John should marry!"

"Oh! Arthur, I cannot suppose anything! I am only quite sure that there is a Father who will take care of our children. I do not know how, but I am certain we shall not be forsaken. Do not grieve for us. I am not afraid."

"Not of poverty, even for the children?"

"No!" said Violet. "I know it will not come, unless it is the best thing for them."

He did not entirely comprehend her, but he liked to watch her face; it looked so beautiful in its perfect trust. He could not share that peaceful confidence for the future, the harvest of his past recklessness was present poignant

dread and anxiety for the innocent ones on whom the penalty must fall. He relapsed into silence, and perhaps his meditations were as much perplexed by the nine Arabic figures as those of Violet's convalescence had once been, only where hers were units, his were hundreds.

She interrupted him with more of John's letters, and the amusing detail of the West Indian life stood her in good stead till the sounds of return brightened his face; and Johnnie sprang into the room loaded with treasures from a Christmas tree. Never had she seen the little fellow's face so merry, or heard his tongue go so fast, as he threw everything into her lap, and then sprang about from her to his papa, showing his prizes, and presenting them. Here were some lemon-drops for papa, and here a beautiful box for mamma, and a gutta-percha frog for Helen, and a flag for Annie, and bon-bons for both, and for Sarah too, and a delightful story about a little Arthur, that nobody could have but the baby — Johnnie would keep it for him till he could read it.

"And what have you got for yourself, Johnnie?" said his father.

"I have the giving it!" said Johnnie.

"You are your mother's own boy, Johnnie," said Arthur, with a sort of fond deep sadness, as the child mounted his footstool to put one of the lemon-drops into his mouth, watching to be told that it was good.

He went off to the nursery to feed Sarah on sugar-plums, and dispose the frog and banner on his sisters' beds to delight them in the morning; while Percy, coming in, declared that this had been the little boy's happiest time. He had been far too shy for enjoyment, perfectly well behaved, but not stirring a step from his protector, only holding his hand, and looking piteously at him if invited away; and Percy declared, he was as much courted as a young lady in her teens. Sitting down with him at a table surrounded by small elves, Percy had of course kept them in a roar of laughter, throughout which Johnnie had preserved his

gravity, only once volunteering a whisper, that he wished Helen was there; but Percy thought that when unmolested by attention, he had seemed quietly amused. When admitted to the Christmas tree in its glory, he had been slightly afraid of it at first, as of an unexpected phenomenon, and had squeezed his friend's hand very tight; but as he perceived how things were going, his alarm had given place to silent, joyous whispers, appropriating his gifts to those at home. He had no idea of keeping anything for himself; and Percy had distressed him by a doubt whether the book, as a godfather's gift, ought to be transferred. On this Johnnie was scrupulous, and Percy had been obliged to relieve his mind by repeating the question for him to Colonel Harrington, whether he might give the book to his little brother. This settled, Johnnie's happiness had been complete, and his ecstasy during their return, at having a present for everybody, was, said Percy, the prettiest comment he had ever known on the blessedness of giving.

It evidently struck Arthur. At night, Violet, from her sofa, heard him murmur to himself, "My boy! my unselfish boy, what will you think of your father?" and then stifle a groan.

The next afternoon, Johnnie, having as a preliminary, inscribed his brother's unwieldy name all over the fly-leaf, was proceeding most happily to read the book aloud, lying on the hearth-rug, with his heels in the air. He read his mamma into a slumber, his papa into a deep reverie, which resulted in his dragging himself up from his chair, by the help of the chimney-piece, and reaching pen and writing-case from Violet's table.

"Oh! Papa!" whispered Johnnie, in an injured tone, at not having been asked to do the little service.

"I thought it would disturb mamma less," returned Arthur, sinking back; "but you may give me the ink. And now, my dear, go on to yourself."

"Are you going to write, Papa? That is being much better."

"I am going to try to write to your uncle. Johnnie, supposing you lose me, I look to your uncle and you for care of the little ones."

Johnnie gave a great sigh, and looked at his father, but made no answer. Papa's writing was a matter of curiosity, and he stood watching in silence.

"You must not watch me, Johnnie," said Arthur, presently, for whether his son could read his writing or not, he could not bear his eyes upon it. The boy had dropped into his place on the carpet in a moment.

It was a full confession and outpouring of his troubles. It cost him much, for there was shame at his own folly and selfishness, and he had to disclose extravagance that he well knew to be, in John's eyes, especially inexcusable. So painful was the effort, that even his fears for his family would not alone have determined him on making it, if it had not been for his new resolution to face the worst, and to have no more shufflings or concealments. He could bear to tell John better than his father, and Percy had bound him to silence towards Lord Martindale. The whole was explained to the best of his powers, which were not at present great. His debts, including that to Percy, he believed to exceed ten thousand; his resources were limited to the sale of his commission, and the improbable recovery of the debt from Gardner — his wife and children were entirely unprovided for. "I can only trust to your kindness," he wrote. "If I could see you, I could die in peace. I know that while you live, you will never see Violet distressed. I have no right to ask anything, but this much I will and must beg may be looked on as my last wish. Never let the children be taken from their mother's charge. If they are to be better than I, it must be her doing. And though this is more than I should dare to ask, if you can help me, do not, when I am gone, let my boys grow up to find their father's memory loaded with these hateful debts, hanging round their necks like a burden. I know Johnnie's sense of honour would never let him rest till they were cleared; but I cannot look

at his face and think of his hearing how I have served his mother. He does love me now, Heaven knows, undeservedly enough. I cannot bear to think of a cloud on his remembrance of me."

CHAPTER XV.

Either grief will not come, or if it must,
Do not forecast.
And while it cometh, it is almost past.
Away distrust,
My God hath promised; He is just.

G. HERBERT.

"ARTHUR, the landlady has been to ask how much longer we shall want the rooms?"

"How long have we been here?"

"We came on the 20th of April, and this is the 3rd of June. What a difference it has made in you!"

"And in you; Ventnor is a grand doctor."

"And Johnnie is really beginning to have a colour. How pleased his grandpapa will be to see him so much stronger and more spirited. I do not think Lord Martindale could have done anything kinder by us than sending us here."

"How does the purse hold out?"

"I have been reckoning that we could stay on three weeks more before going to Brogden; and, if you like it, I should wish to spend our wedding-day here," said Violet, in the shy diffident way in which she was wont to proffer any request for her own gratification.

"I had another scheme for our wedding-day. What do you say to spending it at Wrangerton?"

She looked up in his face as if to see if he really meant it, then, the glad flush darted into her cheeks, and with a cry of joy like a child, she almost sobbed out, "Oh Arthur, Arthur! thank you."

He looked at her, amused, and enjoying her ecstasy. "So you approve, Mrs. Martindale?"

"O, to go to mamma! to show mamma the children? Annette! home! — Johnnie to see Helvellyn! — my sisters!

Olivia's baby!" cried Violet, in incoherent exclamations, almost choked with joy.

"My poor Violet," said Arthur, surprised and almost remorseful; "I did not know you wished it so very much."

"I believe I had left off thinking about it," said Violet; "but I am so very much obliged to you, dear Arthur — how very kind it is."

It never occurred to her as it did to him, that the kindness might have come sooner. "I only hope you like it," she added, after a pause.

"Don't I like what makes you look as you do now?" said he, smiling. "I shall enjoy looking up our old quarters. Besides," he added, more gravely, "it is your turn now; and liking apart, I know I have not used Mrs. Moss well, in keeping you so long from her. You must let her know it was not your fault."

"May I write, then? Oh, Arthur, dearest! if I could but find words to tell you how happy you have made me!"

It was no sudden determination, for he brought a "Bradshaw" out of his pocket, with all the various railways and trains underscored in pencil in a most knowing way, and a calculation of expenses on the cover, all wrong — for Arthur had never done an addition sum right in his life.

Violet was to write as soon as she pleased, and fix the day and hour.

Perhaps Violet had never been so happy in her life as when, in the afternoon, she wandered a little apart on the beach, to realize and feed on her new treasure of delight. Arthur and the children were felicitously dabbling in sand and sea-water, reducing the frocks to a condition, that would have been Sarah's daily distraction, if she had not reconciled herself to it by observing, "it did her heart good to see the Colonel take to the children, though he was no more to be trusted with them than a sea-mew; and if it was not for Master John, she believed they would all come home some day drownded."

As soon as the spring was sufficiently advanced, Lord

Martindale had sent the whole party to recruit by the sea-side, at their own dear Ventnor, and there the last six weeks had been spent in the daily joy of watching Arthur's progress in recovery; — until now a slight degree of weakness and languor, an occasional cough, and his greatly altered appearance, were the only evident remains of his illness; and though she could not feel that his health was absolutely re-established, there was such abundant cause for hope and thankfulness, as filled her heart to overflowing, especially when she was rejoiced by tokens of that more blessed change within.

His spirits had returned with his health. Perhaps it was part of his boyish nature, that his sorrow for his errors, though sincere and earnest, did not permanently depress him, when not brought before his mind; but rather the sense of behaving well added to his brightness. There was nothing to conceal; the guilty consciousness was gone, and the fear for the future was distant. His manners had a sweetness more engaging than ever. To his wife, who had, as he recovered, suffered from the effects of her exertions, he was most affectionately attentive, and his children were his delight, while little Johnnie throve and expanded into spirit and mirth, like a plant reviving in sunshine.

He had gone over Violet's old haunts with her, and she had enjoyed making him enter into the feelings associated with the scenes she had visited with his brother. John was expected to return in the summer, but even this anticipation paled in comparison with the present felicity. That longing for her own home had been forced into such a remote cell, that she had had no idea of its strength till now, when it was allowed to spring up and colour everything.

She walked along the shore within sight of the cottage, where she had been with John, too small and expensive for their present numbers and means, and looking up at its bowery wicket, gathered up the remembrances associated with it.

She had come thither a mere child, a wife and mother,

before strength, spirits, or judgment were equal to her tasks, — terrified at her responsibility, perceiving her failures, sinking under the load too early laid on her. There, had she been guided to comfort, — there, had her hand been taught to clasp the rod and staff, that had led her safe through the shadow, well nigh of death. How would her heart have fainted if she could have guessed what had awaited her! But these things were past, and their memory was sweetened by thankfulness. And now, where once stood the self-torturing, pining girl, was now the calm trustful woman, — serene beneath the overshadowing Wings, resting on the everlasting Arms, — relying, least of all, upon herself. Further trouble might be in store; the clouds might return after the rain; but her peace was not mere freedom from storms, it was the security that there was One who would be with her and her loved ones through all, and thus could she freely rejoice in present sunshine, without scanning each distant cloud, or marring present bliss by future dread.

It was complete gladness. There was not a misgiving whether home might be exactly as it stood in her memory, or in Johnnie's imagination; and she filled the children's heads so much with what they were to see, that their papa declared he had found Annie under the belief that Helvellyn was her grandfather.

Arthur was so much charmed with seeing his wife so happy, that, forgetting all his fears of tediousness, he partook the enjoyment of her anticipations. He was the first, when they came in sight of a mountain, to lift Johnnie on his knee and tell him it was Helvellyn; and mamma's resentment at the grievous error was one of the prettiest and merriest things imaginable.

However, when Helvellyn actually appeared, and she felt herself really coming home, she was silent, in anxiety and doubt. She must be very different from the Violet who had gone away. Would her mother and Matilda think she had improved according to her opportunities?

She could hardly reply when Arthur recognized the High-street, so much wider in her imagination, and her heart beat as the garden wall and the lawn were before her. At the door — yes! — it was, it was the mother for whose embrace she had so often longed! Timidly affectionate and hastily nervous, she could hardly afford one moment to her daughter in her frightened haste to greet her son-in-law, before he was ready, as he was lifting the children out. Here, too, were Annette and Mr. Moss, the young ladies were in the drawing-room, detained by etiquettes of Matilda's; but Violet hardly knew who spoke to her, the joy was to see a baby of hers at last in her mother's arms.

She could hardly see any one but the slight worn-looking mother, whose low, sad-toned voice awoke such endless recollections, and made her realize that she was once more beside mamma. To look at her sisters almost disturbed her; and it well-nigh struck her as unnatural to find the children hanging on her.

Still more unnatural was it to be conducted upstairs, like company, to the best room, and to find her mother in distress and solicitude lest things should not be comfortable, and such as they were used to. And oh! the strangeness of seeing her little ones in her own old nursery, waited upon by the sisters she had left as children — and by Sarah, settled in there as if she had never been away. One part of her life or the other must be a dream.

Dear as all the faces were, it was a relief to be silent for a little while, as Arthur, half-asleep, rested in the large old arm-chair, and she unpacked, too happy for weariness; and the clear pure mountain air breathing in at the open window, infusing life into every vein, as she paused to look at the purple head above the St. Erme woods, and to gaze on the fragrant garden beneath; then turned away to call to mind the childish faces which she had not yet learnt to trace in those fine-looking young women.

"Ha!" said Arthur, rousing himself; "are all the pretty plaits and braids come out again? A welcome sight."

"Mamma thought me altered," said Violet; "and I thought I would not look more old than I could help; so I would not put on my cap for fear it should distress her."

"Old! altered!" said Arthur. "How dare you talk of such things!"

"I can't help it," said Violet, meekly.

"Well! I believe I see what you mean," he said, studying her with a gravity that was amusing. "There's your youngest sister, Octavia, is not she?"

"Oh, is not she pretty?"

"Whish! don't praise yourself; she is the image of you at sixteen. Now that I have seen her, I see you are changed; but somehow — the word that always suited you best was lovely; and you have more of that style of thing than even when your cheeks were pink. Not your oval face and white skin, you know, but that — that look that *is* my Violet — my heart's-ease, that used to keep my heart up last winter. Ay! you are more to my mind!"

That little episode was the especial charm of Violet's evening — a happy one, though there were some anxieties, and a few fond little illusions dispelled.

It might be the dread of Arthur's being annoyed, as she watched him looking very pale and spiritless from fatigue, which made her perceive that all dinner-time Matilda was overwhelming him with a torrent of affected nonsense — or at least what Violet would have thought so in any one but her highly respected eldest sister; and she feared, too, that he could not admire the girlish airs and graces which did not become that sharpened figure and features. She had not known how much more Matilda talked than any one else; even her father only put in a caustic remark here and there, when Matilda *would* know all Lord St. Erme's and Lady Lucy's views and habits. Mrs. Moss was silenced whenever her low voice tried to utter a sentence. Annette, quiet and gentle as ever, looked drooping and subdued, and scarcely spoke, while the two fine blooming girls, who seemed like new acquaintance, were still as mice in awe and shyness.

Caroline, the second sister, was married and settled in Canada; and the three blanks that weddings had made only now impressed themselves on her mind as a novelty.

After dinner, Violet felt as if she must rescue Arthur from Matilda at any cost, and succeeded in sitting her down to the piano; and to secure his quiet, though feeling it a very presumptuous venture, she drew her chair near her father, and set herself to talk to him. Mr. Moss was quite amazed to find a woman — a daughter — capable of rational conversation. She went on with the more spirit, from her pleasure in seeing Arthur, instead of dozing under cover of the music, going to sit by Mrs. Moss and talk to her, and though nothing was heard, their countenances were proof enough of their interest. — Mrs. Moss's thin mild face quite colouring up at the unwonted attention, and her eyes glistening. In fact they were talking about Violet, and in such a strain that Mrs. Moss that night confided to Annette, that she should never again believe a word against Colonel Martindale.

But if the fortnight was to be like this, how was Arthur to bear it? Violet dreaded it for him the more because he was so very good and forbearing, not making one remark on what she knew must have struck him. She could almost have reproached herself with selfishness in never having thought of his want of companionship and amusement.

The night's rest, however, made a great difference in his capacity for entertainment, beginning from his laugh at Helen's inquiry, "What was the use of so many aunts?" He lay on the grass in the sunshine, playing with the children, and fast making friends with the younger aunts, who heartily relished his fun, though they were a good deal afraid of him; while Violet sat under the verandah, feasting her eyes upon Helvellyn, and enjoying the talk with her sisters as much as she could, while uneasy at the lengthened housekeeping labours that her mother was undergoing. They were to retrace one of their memorable walks by the river side in the afternoon, but were prevented by the visit expected all the morning, but deferred to that fashionable hour, of Mrs.

Albert Moss, who sailed in, resolved that the Honourable Mrs. Martindale should find one real companion in the family.

Those fluttering silks and fringes seemed somewhat to stand on end at finding themselves presented to a slight, simply dressed figure in a plain straw bonnet; and the bare-legged, broad-sashed splendours of Miss Albertine Louisa stood aghast at the brown holland gardening suits of the London cousins.

"In training for the Highlanders?" was Arthur's mischievous aside to Octavia, setting her off into the silent frightened laugh that was his especial diversion; and he continued, as they stood half in and half out of the window, "There 's Helen patronizing her! I hope she will take her down to the sand-heap, where the children have been luxuriating all the morning."

"Oh! how can you —"

"It is my father's great principle of education," said Arthur, solemnly, "to let them grope in the dirt. I never rested till I had seen my boy up to the ears in mud. — But ha! what a magnificent horse! Why," as he started forward to look at it, "I declare, it is stopping here!"

"Olivia and Mr. Hunt in the gig!" cried Octavia. "Oh, she has the baby in her lap!"

Matilda and Mrs. Albert Moss looked at each other, shocked. "What will Mr. Hunt make her do next?"

"Poor Olivia!" said Mrs. Albert. "We regret the connexion; but Mr. Hunt will have his own way. You must excuse —"

It was lost. Seeing the new comers in difficulties between baby, horse, and gate, Arthur had sped out to open the last for them; and Violet had sprung after him, and received the child in her arms while her sister alighted. Here was the *mésalliance* of the family, too wealthy to have been rejected, but openly disdained by Matilda, while the gentle Mrs. Moss and Annette hardly ventured to say a good word for him. Violet's apprehensions had chiefly centred on him, lest his

want of refinement should make him very disagreeable to Arthur; and she almost feared to look up as she held out her hand to him.

In a moment her mind was relieved; voice, look, and manner, all showed that the knightly soul was in him, and that he had every quality of the gentleman, especially the hatred of pretension, which made him retain the title of English yeoman as an honourable distinction.

It was a pretty group of contrasts; the soldierly, high-bred, easy grace of the pallid black-haired Colonel, with the native nobleness of bearing of the stalwart farmer, equally tall, and his handsome ruddy face glowing with health; and the two sisters, the one fresh, plump, and rosy, the picture of a happy young mother, and the other slender and dignified, with the slightly worn countenance, which, even in her most gladsome moods, retained that pensive calmness of expression.

The baby occupied the ladies, the horse their husbands; and on hearing what guests were in the drawing-room, Mr. Hunt, with a tell-tale "then," said he would drive on to his business at Coalworth, inviting the Colonel to take the vacant seat.

With Arthur off her mind, Violet was free to enjoy, and soon found that the only flaw in Olivia's felicity was the Wrangerton fashion of sneering at her husband, and trying to keep her up to Matilda's measure of gentility. Proud as she was of her "George," he had not made her bold enough to set those censures at nought; but when she found Violet of his way of thinking, she joyfully declared that she would never allow herself to be again tormented by Matilda's proprieties. How glad she was that George had insisted; for, as she confided to Violet and Annette, she knew that bringing the baby without a maid, would be thought so vulgar that she would have stayed at home, in spite of her desire to see Violet; but her husband had laughed at her scruples, declaring that if her sister could be offended by her coming in this manner, she must be a fine lady not worth pleasing.

Perhaps Mr. Hunt so expected to find her. He was a breeder of horses on an extensive scale, and had knowledge enough of the transactions of Mark Gardner and his set, not to be very solicitous of the acquaintance of Colonel Martindale, while he dreaded that the London beauty would irretrievably fill his little wife's head with nonsense.

One look swept away his distrust of Mrs. Martindale; and the charm of the Colonel's manner had gained his heart before the drive was over. The next day he was to send a horse for Arthur to ride to Lassonthwayte to see his whole establishment; and Violet found, she might dismiss her fears of want of amusement for her husband.

He had sold off all his own horses, and had not ridden since his illness, and the thought seemed to excite him like a boy. His eyes sparkled at the sight of the noble hunter sent for him; and Violet had seldom felt happier than as she stood with the children on the grass-plat, hearing her sisters say how well he looked on horseback, as he turned back to wave her an adieu, with so lover-like a gesture, and so youthful an air, that it seemed to bring back the earliest days of their marriage.

This quiet day, only diversified by a call from Lord St. Erme and Lady Lucy, and by accompanying Mrs. Moss to make some visits to old friends in the town, brought Violet to a fuller comprehension of her own family.

Her mother was what she herself might have become but for John. She was an excellent person, very sensible, and completely a lady; but her spirit had been broken by a caustic, sharp-tempered, neglectful husband, and she had dragged through the world bending under her trials, not rising above them. Her eldest daughter had been sent to a fashionable school, and had ever since domineered over the whole family, while the mother sank into a sort of bonne to the little ones, and a slave to her husband. There was much love for her among her fine handsome girls, but little honour for the patient devotion and the unfailing good sense that judged aright, but could not act.

Annette, her chief comfort, tried to bring up her pupil Octavia to the same esteem for her; but family example was stronger than precept, and Annette had no weight; while even Mr. Hunt's determination that Olivia should show due regard to her mother, was looked on as one of his rusticities. Poor Mrs. Moss was so unused to be treated as a person of importance, that she could hardly understand the attention paid her, not only by Violet, but by the Colonel; while the two young sisters, who regarded Violet and her husband as the first of human beings, began to discover that "O, it is only mamma!" was not the most appropriate way of speaking of her; and that when they let her go on errands, and wait on every one, Violet usually took the office on herself.

So busy was Mrs. Moss, that Violet had very few minutes of conversation with her, but she saw more of Annette, in whom the same meek character was repeated, with the tendency to plaintiveness that prevented its real superiority from taking effect. She drooped under the general disregard, saw things amiss, but was hopeless of mending them; and for want of the spirit of cheerfulness, had become faded, worn, and weary. Violet tried to talk encouragingly, but she only gave melancholy smiles, and returned to speak of the influences that were hurting Octavia.

"Do not let us dwell on what we cannot help," said Violet; "let us do our best, and then leave it in the best Hands, and He will bring out good. You cannot think how much happier I have been since I knew it was wrong to be faint-hearted."

Before the end of the day, she had seen her mother and Annette look so much more cheerful, that the wish crossed her that she could often be at hand.

By and by Arthur came home in the highest spirits, tossing Annie in the air, as he met her in the passage, and declaring himself so far from tired, that he had not felt so well for a year, and that the mountain breezes had taken the weight off his chest for good and all. He was in perfect

raptures with Lassonthwayte and with its master, had made an engagement to bring Violet, her mother, and the children to stay there a week, and—"What more do you think?" said he.

"Everything delightful, I see by your face," said Violet.

"Why, Hunt has as pretty a little house as ever I saw in the village of Lassonthwayte, to be let for a mere nothing, just big enough to hold us, and the garden all over roses, and that style of thing. Now, I reckon, our allowance would go three times as far here as in London; and if I were to sell out, the money, invested in these concerns of Hunt's, would be doubled in a year or two — at any rate, before the boys will want schooling. If I do know anything, it is of horses, you see, and we should pay off Percy and all the rest of them, and be free again."

"Live near mamma and Olivia!"

"Ah! I knew you would like it. The mountain air will bring back your colour, and make a Hercules of Johnnie yet. I longed to have him there to-day! We may live cheaply, you know, not get into all this town lot; only have the girls staying with us, and give your mother a holiday now and then. Don't you fancy it, Mrs. Martindale?"

"It is too delightful! I suppose we must not settle it without your father though."

"He can't object to our living at half the cost, and getting out of debt — I 'll talk him over when we go home. Hunt is as fine a fellow as I ever saw, and as steady as old time."

CHAPTER XVI.

> And oft, when in my heart I heard
> Thy timely mandate, I deferred
> The task, in smoother paths to stray,
> But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.
> *Ode to Duty* — WORDSWORTH.

LASSONTHWAYTE lost none of its charms on closer acquaintance. Mr. Hunt's farm stood on the slope of a hill, commanding a view of the mountains, rising like purple

clouds above the moorland, richly carpeted with the varied colours of heath, fern, and furze, and scattered with flocks of the white bleached mountain sheep, and herds of sturdy little black cattle; while the valley, nearer at hand, was fringed with woods, sheltering verdant pasture land, watered by the same clear frolicsome stream that danced through the garden — Olivia's garden — brilliant with roses and other beauties, such as the great Harrison himself would hardly have disdained.

Lord St. Erme might well call it a farm of the poets, so well did everything accord with the hearty yeoman and his pretty shepherdess-looking wife. The house was of the fine old order, large and lofty, full of wonders in the way of gables, porches and oriels, carved doors and panels, in preservation that did them honour due, and the furniture betokening that best of taste which perceives the fitness of things. All had the free homely air of plenty and hospitality — the open doors, the numerous well-fed men and maids, the hosts of live creatures — horses, cows, dogs, pigs, poultry, each looking like a prize animal boasting of its own size and beauty — and a dreadful terror to Johnnie. He, poor little boy, was the only person to whom Lassonthwayte was not a paradise. Helen and Annie had no fears, and were wild with glee, embracing the dogs, climbing into dangerous places, and watching the meals of every creature in the yard; but poor Johnnie imagined each cow that looked at him to be a mad bull, trembled at each prancing dog, and was miserable at the neighbourhood of the turkey-cock; while Mr. Hunt's attempts to force manliness on him only increased his distress to such a degree as to make it haunt him at night. However, even this became a source of pleasant feeling; Arthur, once so rough with him, now understood the secret of his delicacy of nerves, and reverenced him too much to allow him to be tormented. Even in the worst of Johnnie's panics at night would come smiles, as he told how papa would not let him be forced to pat the dreadful dog, and had carried him in his arms through the herd

of cattle, though it did tire him, for after putting him down, he had to lean on the gate and pant. So next time the little boy would not ask to be carried, and by the help of holding his hand, so bravely passed the savage beasts, that his uncle pronounced that they should make a man of him yet.

Arthur, always happier when the little fingers were in his, was constantly talking of the good that Johnnie was to gain in the life in the open air; and this project continually occupied them. The cottage was a very pretty one, and most joyously did Olivia show it off to Violet and Mrs. Moss, planning the improvements that Mr. Hunt was to make in it, and helping Violet fix on the rooms. It seemed like the beginning of rural felicity; and Arthur talked confidently to his wife of so rapidly doubling his capital, that he should pay off his debts without troubling his father, who need never be aware of their extent.

Violet did not quite like this, but Arthur argued "They are my own concerns, not his, and if I can extricate myself without help, why should he be further plagued about me?"

She did not contest the point; it would be time enough when they were at Brogden, but it made her rather uneasy; the concealment was a little too like a return to former habits, and she could not but fear the very name of horses and races. Still, in the way of business, and with George Hunt, a man so thoroughly to be relied on, it was a different thing; and Arthur's mind was so changed in other matters, that she could not dream of distrust. The scheme was present pleasure enough in itself, and they all fed on it, though Mr. Hunt always declared that the Colonel must not consider himself pledged till he had consulted his own family, and that he should do nothing to the house till he had heard from him again.

Violet could not satisfy herself that Lord and Lady Martindale would give ready consent, and when talking it over alone with her mother, expressed her fears.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Moss, "perhaps it will be all for the best. We cannot tell whether it might turn out well

for you to be settled near us. Colonel Martindale is used to something different, and your children are born to another rank of life."

"O Mamma, that could make no difference."

"Not, perhaps, while they were young, but by and by you would not wish to have them feeling that we are not like their other relations. My dear child, you need not blush to that degree!"

"They will never feel that you are not equal to — to the grandest — the dearest!" said Violet tearfully.

"You would try not to let them, dearest, but the truth would be too strong," said Mrs. Moss, smiling. "You know we had been content to think poor Louisa our model of manners till you came among us again."

"O, Mamma! at least there was Lady Lucy."

"And now we see you fit company for Lady Lucy, and that we are not. No, my dear, don't deny it; I see it in your ease with her, and it is quite right."

"I don't like to think so!"

"I understand better now," said Mrs. Moss. "Perhaps it would have been more advisable if there had been no intermingling of ranks, yet I can hardly regret, when I see you, my Violet. It has raised your whole tone of mind, but it has cut you off from us, and we cannot conceal it from ourselves. If you do come here, you must make up your mind beforehand not to be too intimate even with Olivia and George."

"I am very glad I am not to settle it!" said Violet, with a sigh. "I should be much disappointed to give it up, and yet sometimes — it will be some consolation at least to find that you have not set your heart on it, Mamma?"

"I have left off setting my heart on anything, my dear child," said Mrs. Moss, with a sigh, telling of many and many a disappointment. Sincerely religious as she was, it was out of sight, and scarcely a word was ever breathed to her daughter of her true spring of action.

There was a feeling that she was not mistaken in thinking that too much intercourse was not desirable. Arthur was

apt to call the distance from Wrangerton to Lassonthwayte seven miles, instead of five, and soon it grew to nine, with a bad road and a shocking hill. This was after he had discovered from Mr. Hunt that Lord St. Erme's affairs had fallen into a most unsatisfactory state, while the Messrs. Moss had been amassing a comfortable fortune; and that every one knew that the colliery accident was chiefly owing to Albert's negligence, cowardice, and contempt of orders; so that it was the general marvel that the earl did not expose them, and remove his affairs from their hands.

Arthur could suppose that the cause of this forbearance might be the connexion between Theodora and the Moss family; and the idea made him feel almost guilty when in company with the Earl. Matilda, and indeed the others, were surprised at his declining the invitations to stay at the park; but Violet, as well as he, thought it better to lay themselves under no further obligations; though they could not avoid receiving many attentions. Lady Lucy *fêted* the children, and Violet accomplished her wish of showing Johnnie the little Madonna of Ghirlandajo.

The first sight of the rooms made Violet somewhat melancholy, as she missed the beautiful works of art that had been a kind of education to her eye and taste, and over which she had so often dreamt and speculated with Annette. However, there was something nobler in the very emptiness of their niches, and there was more appropriateness in the little picture of the Holy Child embracing His Cross, now that it hung as the sole ornament of the library, than when it was *vis-à-vis* to Venus blindfolding Cupid, and surrounded by a bewildering variety of subjects, profane and sacred, profanely treated. She could not help feeling that there was a following in those steps when she saw how many luxuries had been laid aside, and how the brother and sister, once living in an atmosphere of morbid refinement, were now toiling away, solely thoughtful of what might best serve their people, mind or body, and thinking no service beneath them.

Lord St. Erme's talent and accomplishment were no longer conducive only to amusement or vanity, though they still were exercised; and it was curious to see his masterly drawings hung round the schools and reading-room, and his ready pencil illustrating his instructions, and to hear him reading great authors to the rude audience whom he awakened into interest. There might be more done than sober judgments appreciated, and there were crotchets that it was easy to ridicule, but all was on a sound footing, the work was thoroughly carried out, and the effects were manifest. The beautiful little church rising at Coalworth would find a glad congregation prepared to value it, both by the Earl and by the zealous curate.

Violet wished Theodora could but see, and wondered whether she would ever venture to make a visit at Lassonthwayte; hardly, she supposed, before her marriage.

Lady Lucy one day asked when Miss Martindale was to be married, and on hearing that no period could be fixed, said she was grieved to find it so; it would be better for her brother that it should be over. Violet ventured to express her hopes that he had at last found peace and happiness.

"Yes," said Lucy, "he is very busy and happy. I do not think it dwells on his spirits, but it is the disappointment of his life, and he will never get over it."

"I hope he will find some one to make him forget it."

"I do not think he will. No one can ever be like Miss Martindale, and I believe he had rather cling to the former vision, though not repining. He is quite content, and says it is a good thing to meet with a great disappointment early in life."

Violet doubted not of his contentment when she had looked into his adult school, and seen how happily he was teaching a class of great boys to write; nor when she heard him discussing prices, rents, and wages with Mr. Hunt.

Lord St. Erme and Lady Lucy had come to an early dinner at Lassonthwayte, thus causing great jealousy on the part of Mrs. Albert Moss, and despair on Matilda's, lest

Olivia should do something extremely amiss without her supervision. Little did she guess that Lucy had been reckoning on the pleasure of meeting her dear Mrs. Moss for once without those daughters.

After dinner, all the party were on the lawn, watching the tints on the mountains, when Lord St. Erme, coming to walk with Mrs. Martindale, asked her, with a smile, if she remembered that she had been the first person who ever hinted that the Westmoreland hills might be more to him than the Alps.

"I have not forgotten that evening," he said. "It was then that I first saw Mr. Fotheringham;" and he proceeded to ask many questions about Percy's former appointment at Constantinople, his length of service, and reason for giving it up, which she much enjoyed telling. He spoke too of his books, praising them highly, and guessing which were his articles in reviews, coming at last to that in which, as he said, he had had the honour of being dissected.

"Poor Lucy has hardly yet forgiven it," he said; "but it was one of the best things that ever befell me."

"I wonder it did not make you too angry to heed it."

"Perhaps I was at first, but it was too candid to be offensive. The arrow had no venom, and was the first independent criticism I had met with. Nobody had cared for me enough to take me to task for my absurdities. I am obliged to Mr. Fotheringham."

Violet treasured this up for Percy's benefit.

This festivity was their last in the north. Their visit at Lassonthwayte had been lengthened from a week to a fortnight, and Lady Martindale wrote piteous letters, entreating them to come to Brogden, where she had made every arrangement for their comfort, even relinquishing her own dressing-room. They bade farewell to Wrangerton, Arthur assuring Mrs. Moss that he would soon bring Violet back again; and Mrs. Moss and Violet agreeing that they were grateful for their happy meeting, and would not be too sorry were the delightful vision not to be fulfilled.

At the beginning of their journey, Arthur's talk was all of the horses at Lassonthwayte and the friendship that would soon be struck up between Percy and Mr. Hunt. The railway passed by the village of Worthbourne, and he called Violet to look out at what might yet be Theodora's home.

"For the sake of John and Helen too," said Violet; while the children, eager for anything approaching to a sight, peeped out at the window, and exclaimed that there was a flag flying on the top of the church steeple.

"The village wake, I suppose," said Arthur. "Ha! Helen, we will surprise uncle Percy by knowing all about it!"

At the halt at the Worthbourne station, he accordingly put out his head to ask the meaning of the flag.

"It is for the son and heir, Sir. Old Sir Antony's grandson."

Arthur drew in his head faster than he had put it out, making mutterings to himself that a good deal surprised the children. After their long pleasuring, Cadogan-place looked dingy, and Violet, as she went up to the drawing-room in the gray twilight, could not help being glad that only three months of Arthur's sick leave had expired, and that they were to be there for no more than one night. In spite of many precious associations, she could not love a London house, and the Lassonthwayte cottage seemed the prettier in remembrance.

Arthur had fetched his papers, and had been sitting thoughtful for some time after Johnnie had gone to bed, when he suddenly looked up and said, "Violet, would it be a great vexation to you if we gave up this scheme?"

"Don't think of me. I always thought you might view it differently from a distance."

"It is not that," said Arthur; "I never liked any one better than Hunt, and it is nine if not ten miles from the town. But, Violet, I find we are in worse plight than I thought. Here are bills that must be renewed, and one or two things I had forgotten; and while I owe the money and more too, I could hardly in honesty speculate with the price of my commission."

"No!—oh! You could never be comfortable in doing so."

"If it was only Percy that was concerned, I might get him to risk it, and then double it, and set him and Theodora going handsomely; but — No, it is of no use to think about it. I wish it could be —"

"You are quite right, I am sure."

"The thing that settles it with me is this," continued Arthur. "It is a way of business that would throw me with the old set, and there is no safety but in keeping clear of them. I might have been saved all this if I had not been ass enough to put my neck into Gardner's noose that unlucky Derby-day. I had promised never to bet again after I married, and this is the end of it! So I think I have no right to run into temptation again, even for the chance of getting clear. Do you?"

"You are quite right," she repeated. "If the money is not our own, it would only be another sort —"

"Of gambling. Ay! And though in those days I did not see things as I do now, and Hunt is another sort of fellow, I fancy you had rather not trust me, Mamma?" said he, looking with a rather sad though arch smile into her face.

"Dear Arthur, you know —"

"I know I won't trust myself," he answered, trying to laugh it off. "And you 'll be a good child, and not cry for the cottage?"

"O, no! Mamma and I both thought there might possibly be considerations against it, especially as the girls grow up."

"That's right. I could not bear giving up what you seemed to fancy; but we will visit them when we want a mouthful of air, and Annette and Octavia shall come and stay with us. I should like to show Octavia a little of the world."

"Then, we shall go on as we are?"

"Yes; spend as little as may be, and pay off so much a-year. If we keep no horses, that is so much clear gain."

"That seems the best way; but I almost fear your being well without riding."

"No fear of that! I don't want to go out, and you never do. We will take to our long walks, and, as Percy says, I will read and be rational. I mean to begin Johnnie's Latin as soon as we are settled in. Why, I quite look forward to it."

"How delighted Johnnie will be!"

"We shall do famously!" repeated Arthur. "Nothing like home, after all."

Violet did not think he quite knew what he undertook, and her heart sank at the idea of a London winter, with his health and spirits failing for want of his usual resources. He imagined himself perfectly recovered; but when he went the next day to show himself to the doctor, the stethoscope revealed that the damage was not so entirely removed but that the greatest care would be necessary for some time to come. It sat lightly on him; his spirits depended on his sensations, and he had no fears but that a few months would remove all danger; and Violet would say no word of misgiving. She would have felt that to remonstrate would have been to draw him back, after his first step in the path of resolute self-denial.

CHAPTER XVII.

On Sunday, Heaven's gate stands ope,
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful than hope.
G. HERBERT.

"FIVE years! How little can letters convey the true state of affairs! They can but record events — not their effects nor the insensible changes that may have taken place. My aunt's death, I know, but not what my mother is without her. I have heard of my father's cares, but I have yet to see whether he is aged or broken. And Theodora, she has had many trials, but what can she be — tamed and refined as they tell me she is? I wish I could have gone through London to see Arthur and Violet. There again is the anxious question, whether his repentance is really such as his

touching letter led me to hope. One, at least, I trust to see unchanged — my sweet sister, my best correspondent! Foolish it is to cling to the hope of meeting her again, as that vision of loveliness — that creature of affection and simplicity, that first awoke me to a return of cheerfulness! The boy, too, my godson, my child! he has been the dream of my solitude. At last, here is the village. How bright its welcome, this summer evening! Old faces! — may those at home be as unchanged! Alteration enough here! Even at this distance I see the ruin; but how richly green the park! How fresh the trees, and the shade of the avenue! This is home, thanks to Him, who has led me safely back. Whom do I see yonder in the avenue? A gentleman leading a pony, and a little boy on it! Can it be? — impossible! Yet the step and manner are just as he used to lead Violet's horse! Surely, it must be! I must meet him and hear all before going up to the house; it will prepare them. Stop here."

He was out of the carriage in a moment, and walking down the avenue, feeling as if he only now was in the right way home; but a misgiving crossing him as he came nearer the two figures that had attracted him — there was less resemblance on a nearer view than in the general air when further off.

A shout — "Hollo, John!" settled all doubts.

"Arthur! is it you?" and the brothers' hands were locked together.

"Here is a gentleman you know something of, and who has thought very much of you," continued Arthur, proudly. "There, is not he like her?" as he tried to give a cock-up to the limp, flapping straw hat, under shade of which Johnnie was glowing up to his curls.

"Her very look!" said John. "How is she, Arthur; and all of them?"

"All well. Have you not been at home yet?"

"No; I saw you here, and I could not help coming to meet you, that I might know if all was right."

"You would have found no one at home, unless my

mother and Violet are come in. They are always creeping about together."

"Where is my father?"

"Looking after the workmen at the farm. We left him there because it was Johnnie's supper-time. Why, John, what a hale, middle-aged looking subject you are grown! Was it not wonderful sagacity in me to know you?"

"Greater than mine," said John. "My instinct was failing as I came near. Are you really well?"

"Never better. Johnnie and his mamma nursed me well again, and Helvellyn breezes blew away the remainder. When did you land?"

"This morning. We put in at Liverpool, and I came on at once. How is my mother? She had not been well."

"She was ailing all the winter, but a house full of grandchildren seems to have cured her completely. You will stare to see her a perfect slave to — our eldest girl," said Arthur, checking himself as he was about to speak the name, and John turned to the child.

"Well, Johnnie, and are you fond of riding?"

"With papa holding the rein," and Johnnie edged closer to his father.

"Ay? I hope your uncle did not expect a godson like your dear Cœur de Lion, whom you have been romancing about all the way home. What is the country your uncle has seen, and you want to see, Johnnie?"

"Please, don't, now, Papa," whispered Johnnie, colouring deeply.

"Yes, yes, you shall have it out when you are better acquainted," said Arthur, patting both boy and pony. "Well, John, is this the fellow you expected?"

John smiled, but before he could answer, a voice from behind, shouting to them to wait, caused him to turn, exclaiming, "Percy! I did not know he was here! And Theodora!"

"He came a day or two ago —"

Theodora blushed crimson, and all the glad words of

welcome were spoken by Percy; but he then fell into the background, taking charge of Johnnie, while the other three walked on together, Theodora's arm within that of her eldest brother.

"Thank you for your letter," said Arthur. "It did me great good."

"My impulse was to have set out at once on receiving yours, but I was obliged to wait to get things into train for going on without me; and since that, there have been delays of steamers."

"You could not have come at a better time. We only wanted you to make us complete —"

Arthur was interrupted by a joyous outcry of "Papa! Papa!" from a little group on the other side of the road into which they were emerging.

"Ay! and who else? Look at this fellow!" cried he, catching from Sarah's arm, and holding aloft an elf, whose round mouth and eyes were all laughter, and sturdy limbs all movement, the moment he appeared. "There! have we not improved in babies since your time? And here is a round dumpling that calls itself Anna! And that piece of mischief is grandmamma's girl, aunt Theodora's double!"

Those flashing black eyes were not the ideal John had attached to the name which Arthur had paused to speak; but it would have been hard to be disappointed by the bright creature, who stood on the raised foot-path, pretending to hide her face with a bunch of tall fox-gloves, and peeping out behind them to see whether she was noticed.

"The introduction is all on one side," said Percy. "Do you know who it is, Helen?"

Helen stuck her chin into her neck. She would tell her surmise to no one but Johnnie, who had persuaded Mr. Fotheringham to lift him from horseback, where he was never at ease with any one but papa. He looked up, smiling; "Helen thinks it must be uncle Martindale, because papa is so glad."

Helen ran away, but returned for a ride; and when the

party, that had gathered like a snow-ball, came in front of the cottage, Percy was holding both little sisters on the pony at once, Theodora still leaning on her eldest brother's arm, Johnnie gravely walking on the foot-path, studying his uncle, and Arthur, with the young Arthur pulling his whiskers all the time, was walking forwards and backwards, round and about his brother, somewhat in the ecstatic aimless fashion of a dog who meets his master.

He was the first to exclaim, "There she is! Run on, Johnnie, tell mamma and grandmamma whom we have here."

The first greeting was left exclusively to Lady Martindale.

When John's attention was again at liberty, Violet was standing by her husband, saying, with a sweet smile of playful complaint, "And you have shown him all the children and I was not there!"

"Never mind. They will show off much better with you, you jealous woman. What does John think to hear you scolding?"

"Has he seen all the children?" said Lady Martindale, taking up the note. "Oh! what is Mr. Fotheringham doing with Helen and Annie? It is very dangerous!"

And Lady Martindale hastened to watch over the little girls, who, of course, were anything but grateful for her care, while Violet was asking John about his voyage, and inquiring after the interests he had left in Barbuda.

The first sight of her was a shock. The fragile roses that had dwelt on his imagination had faded away, and she was now, indeed, a beautiful woman, — but not the creature of smiles and tears whom he remembered. The pensive expression, the stamp of anxiety, and the traces of long-continued over-exertion, were visible enough to prove to him that his fears had been fulfilled, and that she had suffered too deeply ever to return to what she had once been.

Yet never had John so enjoyed an arrival, nor felt so thoroughly at home, as when his father had joined them, full of quiet and heartfelt gladness. Stiffness and formality

seemed to have vanished with the state rooms; and there was no longer the circle on company terms, for Lady Martindale herself was almost easy, and Theodora's words, though few, were devoid of the sullen dignity of old times. Violet's timidity, too, was gone, and the agitated wistful glances she used to steal towards her husband, had now become looks of perfect, confiding, yet fostering, affection. John saw her appealed to, consulted, and put forward as important to each and all of the family party, as if every one of them depended on her as he had been wont to do, while she still looked as retiring as ever, and taken up by watching that the children behaved well.

The occupation of the evening was the looking over plans for the new house. Lord Martindale had them all ready, and John soon perceived that his father's wishes were that he should prefer those which most nearly reproduced the original building, pulled down to please Mrs. Nesbit. Lady Martindale had surprised them by making from memory a beautiful sketch of the former house; and her husband, to whom each line produced a fresh hoard of reminiscences, was almost disappointed that John's recollection did not go back far enough to recognize the likeness, though he was obliged to confess that not a wall of it was standing when he was two years old.

The general vote was, of course, that Old Martindale should be renewed, — and it was to be begun — when?

"When ways and means are found," said Lord Martindale. "We must talk over that another time, John."

John, as he bade Theodora good night, murmured thanks for the safety of all the properties which he had been surprised to find in the room prepared for him. Her eyes were liquid as she faltered her answer.

"O, John, it was such a pleasure! How much you have to forgive! How right you were, and how wrong I was!"

"Hush! not now," said John, kindly.

"Yes, now, I cannot look at you till I have said it. I have

felt the truth of every word you said, and I beg your pardon for all that has passed."

He pressed her hand in answer, saying, "It was my fault. But all is well now, and you know how I rejoice."

"Everything is everybody's fault," said Percy, joining him; "but we must not stop to battle the point, or Mr. Hugh Martindale's housekeeper will be irate. Good night, Theodora."

Percy and John were quartered at the Vicarage, and walked thither, at first in silence, till the former said, "Well, what do you think of it?"

"The best coming home I ever had, and the most surprising. I have seen so much that is unexpected, that I don't know how to realize it."

"Heartsease," was Percy's brief reply.

"Violet? You don't mean it?"

"The history of these years is this," said Percy, making an emphatic mark on the gravel with his stick. "Every one else has acted, more or less, idiotically. She has gone about softening, healing, guarding, stirring up the saving part of each one's disposition. If, as she avers, you and Helen formed her, you gave a blessing to all of us."

"How can this be? No one has spoken of her power."

"It is too feminine to be recognized. When you talk to the others you will see I am right. I will speak for myself. I verily believe that but for her I should have been by this time an unbearable disappointed misanthrope."

"A likely subject," said John, laughing.

"You cannot estimate the shock our rupture gave me, nor tell how I tried to say 'don't care,' and never saw my savage spite till her gentle rebuke showed it to me. Her rectitude and unselfishness kept up my faith in woman, and saved me from souring and hardening. On the other hand, her firmness won Theodora's respect, her softness, her affection. She led where I drove, acted the sun where I acted Boreas; and it is she who has restored us to each other."

"Highly as I esteemed Violet, I little thought to hear this! My father wrote that he regretted Theodora's having been left to one so little capable of controlling her."

"Lord Martindale is a very good man, but he has no more discrimination of character than my old cat!" cried Percy. "I beg your pardon, John, but the fact was patent. Mrs. Martindale is the only person who has ever been a match for Theodora. She conquered her, made her proud to submit, and then handed her over to the lawful authorities. If Lord Martindale has an unrivalled daughter, he ought to know whom to thank for it."

"I hope he appreciates Violet."

"In a sort he does. He fully appreciates her in her primary vocation, as who would not, who had watched her last winter, and who sees what she has made her husband."

"Then you are satisfied about Arthur?"

"Better than I ever thought to be."

"And, Percy, what is this that he tells me of your having rescued him at your own expense?"

"Has he told you all that?" exclaimed Percy.

"He wished me to know it in case of his death."

"I could not help it, John," said Percy, in apology. "If you had seen her and her babies, and had to leave him in that condition on her hands, you would have seen there was nothing for it but to throw a sop to the hounds, so that at least they might leave him to die in peace."

"It saved him! But why did you object to my father's hearing of it?"

"Because I knew he would dislike any sense of obligation, and that he could not conveniently pay it off. Besides, we had to keep Arthur's mouth shut out of consideration for the blood-vessel, so I told him to let it rest till you should come. I fancy we have all been watching for you as a sort of *Deus ex Machinâ* to clear up the last act of the drama, though how you are to do so, I cannot conceive."

The next day was Sunday, almost the first truly homelike

Sunday of John's life. Not only was there the churchgoing among friends and kindred after long separation, but the whole family walked thither together, as John had never known them do before; and with his mother on his arm, his little godson holding Lord Martindale's hand, Helen skipping between her father and mother, Theodora gentle and subdued, it seemed as if now, for the first time, they had become a household of the same mind.

It was one of the most brilliant days of summer — a cloudless sky of deep blue sunshine, in which the trees seemed to bask, and the air, though too fresh to be sultry, disposing to inaction. After the second service, there was a lingering on the lawn, and desultory talk about the contrast to the West Indian Sundays, and the black woolly-headed congregation responding and singing so heartily, and so uncontrollably gay and merry.

At length, when Johnnie and Helen, who had an insatiable appetite for picaninny stories, had been summoned to supper, John and Violet found that the rest of their companions had dispersed, and that they were alone.

"I told you that Fanshawe came home with me?" said John. "The new arrangements have increased his income;" then, as Violet looked up eagerly and hopefully, — "he made me a confidence, at which I see you guess."

"I only hope mamma will not be anxious about the climate. I must tell her how well it has agreed with you."

"I am glad that you think there are hopes for him. It has been a long attachment, but he thought it wrong to engage her affections while he had no prospect of being able to marry."

"It is what we guessed!" said Violet. "Dear Annette! If he is what I remember him, she must be happy."

"I can hardly speak highly enough of him. I have found him a most valuable friend, and am sincerely glad to be connected with him; but, tell me, is not this the sister about whom Percy made a slight mistake?"

"Oh! do you know that story? Yes, it was dear Annette!

Otherwise I should never have known about Mr. Fanshawe. It was only a vague preference, but it was very fortunate that it prevented any attachment to Percy, or it would have been hard to decide what would be right."

"Percy was much obliged to you."

"He was very kind not to be angry. I could have wished it exceedingly, but I am so glad that I did not persuade Annette, and particularly glad of this, for she has been out of spirits, and rather wasting her bloom at home, without much definite employment."

"I understand. And did you never wish that you had influenced her otherwise?"

"If Percy and Theodora had not been reconciled, I thought I might have done so. It did seem a long time to go on in doubt whether I had acted for her happiness."

"But you acted in faith that the straightforward path was the safest."

"And now I am so thankful." She paused, they were passing the drawing-room, and saw Arthur lying asleep on the sofa. She stepped in at the French window, threw a light shawl over him, and closed the door. "He did not sleep till daylight this morning," she said, returning to John. "Any excitement gives him restless nights."

"So I feared when I saw those two red spots on his cheeks in the evening. I know them well! But how white and thin he looks! I want to hear what you think of him. My father considers him fully recovered. Do you?"

Violet shook her head. "He is as well as could be hoped after such an illness," she said; "and Dr. L. tells him there is no confirmed disease, but that his chest is in a very tender state, and he must take the utmost care. That delightful mountain air at Lassonthwayte entirely took away his cough, and it has not returned, though he is more languid and tired than he was in the north, but he will not allow it, his spirits are so high."

"I should like you to spend the winter abroad."

"That cannot be. If he is able in October, he must join,

and the regiment is likely to be in London all the winter," said Violet, with a sigh.

"Then he does not mean to sell out?"

"No, we cannot afford it. We must live as little expensively as we can, to get clear of the difficulties. Indeed, now the horses are gone, it is such a saving that we have paid off some bills already."

"Has Arthur really parted with his horses?"

"With all of them, even that beautiful mare. I am afraid he will miss her very much, but I cannot say a word against it, for I am sure it is right."

"*All* the horses!" repeated John. "What are you to do without a carriage horse?"

"Oh! that is nothing new. We have not had one fit for me to use, since the old bay fell lame three years ago. That does not signify at all, for walking with the children suits me much better."

John was confounded. He had little notion of existence without carriages and horses.

"I shall have Arthur to walk with now. He promises Johnnie and me delightful walks in the park," said Violet, cheerfully, "if he is but well!"

"Ah! I see you dread that winter."

"I do!" came from the bottom of Violet's heart, spoken under her breath; then, as if regretting her admission, she smiled and said, "Perhaps there is no need! He has no fears, and it will be only too pleasant to have him at home. I don't think about it," added she, replying to the anxious eyes that sought to read her fears. "This summer is too happy to be spoilt with what may be only fancies, and after the great mercies we have received, it would be too bad to distrust and grieve over the future. I have so often thanked you for teaching me the lesson of the lilies."

"I fear you have had too much occasion to practise it."

"It could not be too much!" said Violet. "But often I do not know what would have become of me, if I had not been obliged, as a duty, to put aside fretting thoughts,

and been allowed to cast the shadow of the cross on my vexations."

His eye fell on a few bright links of gold peeping out round her neck — "You have *that* still. May I see it?"

She took off the chain and placed it in his hand. "Thanks for it, more than ever!" she said. "My friend and preacher in time of need it has often been, and Johnnie's too."

"Johnnie?"

"Yes, you know the poor little man has had a great deal of illness. This is the first spring he has been free from croup; and you would hardly believe what a comfort that cross has been to him. He always feels for the chain, that he may squeeze aunt Helen's cross. At one time I was almost afraid that it was a superstition, he was such a very little fellow; but when I talked to him, he said 'I like it because of our Blessed Saviour. It makes me not mind the pain so much, because you said that was like Him, and would help to make me good if I was patient.' Then I remembered what I little understood, when you told me that the cross was his baptismal gift to sweeten his heritage of pain."

John was much affected. "Helen's cross has indeed borne abundant fruit!" said he.

"I told you how even I forgot it at first in the fire, and how it was saved by Johnnie's habit of grasping it in his troubles."

"I am glad it was he!"

"Theodora said that he alone was worthy. But I am afraid to hear such things said of him; I am too ready without them to think too much of my boy."

"It would be difficult," began John; then smiling, "perhaps I ought to take to myself the same caution; the thought of Johnnie has been so much to me, and now I see him, he is so unlike my expectations, and yet so far beyond them. I feel as if I wanted a larger share of him than you and his father can afford me."

"I don't think we shall be jealous," was the happy answer. "Arthur is very proud of your admiration of

Master Johnnie. You know we have always felt as if you had a right in him."

Percy and Theodora here returned from the park, rejoicing to find others as tardy in going in as themselves; Arthur, awakened by the voices, came out, and as the others hurried in, asked John what they had been talking about.

"Of many things," said John; "much of my godson."

"Ay!" said Arthur; "did you not wonder how anything so good can belong to me?"

John smiled, and said, "His goodness belongs to nothing here."

"Nay, it is no time to say that after talking to his mother," said Arthur; "though I know what you mean, and she would not let me say so. Well, I am glad you are come, for talks with you are the greatest treat to her. She seemed to be gathering them up again at Ventnor, and was always telling me of them. She declares they taught her everything good; though that, of course, I don't believe, you know," he added, smiling.

"No; there was much in which she needed no teaching, and a few hints here and there do not deserve what she ascribes to them."

"John," said Arthur, coming nearer to him, and speaking low, "she and her boy are more perfect creatures than you can guess, without knowing the worst of me. You warned me that I must make her happy, and you saw how it was the first year. It has been worse since that. I have neglected them, let them deny themselves, ruined them, been positively harsh to that angel of a boy; and how they could love me, and be patient with me throughout, is what I cannot understand, though — though I can feel it."

"Truly," thought John, as Arthur hastily quitted him, ashamed of his emotion, "if Violet be my scholar, she has far surpassed her teacher! Strange that so much should have arisen apparently from my attempt to help and cheer the poor dispirited girl, in that one visit to Ventnor, which

I deemed so rash a venture of my own comfort — useless, self-indulgent wretch that I was. She has done the very deeds that I had neglected. My brother and sister, even my mother and Helen's brother, all have come under her power of firm meekness — all, with one voice, are ready to 'rise up and call her blessed!' Nay, are not these what Helen would have most wished to effect, and is it not her memorials that have been the instruments of infusing that spirit into Violet? These are among the works that follow her, or, as they sung this evening —

'For seeds are sown of glorious light
A future harvest for the just,
And gladness for the heart that 's right
To recompense its pious trust.' "

And in gladness did he stand before the house that had been destined as the scene of his married life, and look forth on the church-yard where Helen slept. He was no longer solitary, since he had begun to bear the burdens of others; for no sooner did he begin to work, than he felt that he worked with her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

That we, whose work commenced in tears,
May see our labours thrive,
Till finished with success, to make
Our drooping hearts revive.
Though he despond that sows his grain,
Yet, doubtless, he shall come
To bind his full-car'd sheaves, and bring
The joyful harvest home.
Psalm cxxvi. *New Version.*

Business cares soon began. Arthur consented to allow his brother to lay his embarrassments before his father. "Do as you please," he said; "but make him understand that I am not asking him to help me out of the scrape. He does all he can for me, and cannot afford more; or, if he could, Theodora ought to be thought of first. All I wish is, that something should be secured to Violet and the children, and that, if I don't get clear in my life time, these debts may not be left for Johnnie."

"That you may rely on," said John. "I wish I could help you; but there were many things at Barbuda that seemed so like fancies of my own, that I could not ask my father to pay for them, and I have not much at my disposal just now."

"It is a good one to hear you apologizing to me!" said Arthur, laughing, but rather sadly, as John carried off the ominous pocket-book to the study, hoping to effect great things for his brother; and, as the best introduction, he began by producing the letter written at Christmas. Lord Martindale was touched by the commencement, but was presently lost in surprise on discovering Percy's advance.

"Why could he not have written to me? Did he think I was not ready to help my own son?"

"It was necessary to act without loss of time."

"If it were necessary to pay down the sum, why not tell me of it, instead of letting poor Arthur give him a bond that is worth nothing?"

"I fancy, if he had any notion of regaining Theodora, he was unwilling you or she should know the extent of the obligation."

"It is well I do know it. I thought it unsatisfactory to hear of no profit, after all the talk there has been about his books. I feared it was an empty trade: but this is something like. Five thousand! He is a clever fellow, after all!"

"I hope he may soon double it," said John, amused at this way of estimating Percy's powers.

"Well, it was a friendly act," continued Lord Martindale. "A little misjudged in the manner, perhaps; but if you had seen the state Arthur was in —"

"I should have forgiven Percy?" said John, with a slightly ironical smile, that made his father laugh.

"Not that I am blaming him," he said; "but it shall be paid him at once, if it comes to selling Wyelands. You know one cannot be under an obligation of this sort to a lad whom one has seen grow up in the village."

"Perhaps he wishes it to be considered as all in the family."

"So it is. That is the worst of it. It is so much out of what he would have had with Theodora, and little enough

there is for her. A dead loss! Could not Arthur have had more sense, at his age, and with all those children? What's all this?" reading on in dismay. "Seven thousand more at least! I 'll have nothing to do with it!"

An hour after, John came out into the verandah, where Percy was reading, and asked if he knew where Arthur was.

"He got into a ferment of anxiety, and Violet persuaded him to walk it off. He is gone out with Johnnie and Helen. Well, how has he fared?"

"Not as well as I could wish. My father will not do more towards the debts than paying you."

"Ho! I hope he does not think I acted very impertinently towards him?"

John laughed, and Percy continued.

"Seriously, I believe it is the impertinence hardest to forgive, and I shall be glad when the subject is done with. That will be so much off Arthur's mind."

"I wish more was; but I had no idea that there was so little available money amongst us. All I can gain in his favour is, that the estate is to be charged with five hundred pounds a-year for Violet in case of his death; and there's his five thousand pounds for the children; but, for the present debts, my father will only say that, perhaps he may help, if he sees that Arthur is exerting himself to economize and pay them off."

"Quite as much as could reasonably be expected. The discipline will be very good for him."

"If it does not kill him," said John, sighing. "My father does not realize the shock to his health. He is in the state now that I was in when he went abroad, and —"

"And I firmly believe that if you had had anything to do but nurse your cough, you would have been in much better health."

"But it is not only for Arthur that I am troubled. What can be worse than economizing in London, in their position? What is to become of Violet, without carriage, without —"

Percy laughed. "Without court-dresses and powdered footmen? No, no, John. Depend upon it, as long as Violet has her husband safe at home, she wants much fewer necessaries of life than you do."

"Well, I will try to believe it right. I see it cannot be otherwise."

Arthur was not of this mind. He was grateful for his father's forgiveness and assistance, and doubly so for the provision for his wife, hailing it as an unexpected and undeserved kindness. Lord Martindale was more pleased by his manner in their interview than ever he had been before. Still there were many difficulties: money was to be raised; and the choice between selling, mortgaging, or cutting down timber, seemed to go to Lord Martindale's heart. He had taken such pride in the well-doing of his estate! He wished to make further retrenchments in the stable and garden arrangements; but, as he told John, he knew not how to reduce the enormous expense of the latter without giving more pain to Lady Martindale than he could bear to inflict.

John offered to sound her, and discover whether the notion of dismissing Armstrong and his crew would be really so dreadful. He found that she winced at the mention of her orchids and ferns; they recalled the thought of her aunt's love for them, and she had not been in the conservatories for months. John said a word or two on the cost of keeping them up, and the need of prudence, with a view to providing for Arthur's children. It was the right chord. She looked up, puzzled: her mathematical knowledge had never descended to £ *s. d.*

"Is there a difficulty? I thought my dear aunt had settled all her property on dear little Johnnie."

"Yes, but only when he comes to the title; and for the others there is absolutely nothing but Arthur's five thousand pounds to be divided among them all."

"You don't say so, John? Poor little dears! there is scarcely more than a thousand a-piece. Surely, there is my own property —"

"I am sorry to say it was settled so as to go with the title. The only chance for them is what can be saved —"

"Save everything, then," exclaimed Lady Martindale. "I am sure I would give up anything, if I did but know what. We have not had leaders for a long time past, and Theodora's dumb boy does as well as the second footman;

Standaloft left me because she could not bear to live in a cottage; Grimes suits me very well; and I do not think I could do quite without a maid."

"No, indeed, my dear mother," said John, smiling; "that is the last thing to be thought of. All my father wished to know was, whether it would grieve you if we gave the care of the gardens to somewhat less of a first-rate genius?"

"Not in the least," said Lady Martindale, emphatically. "I shall never bear to return to those botanical pursuits. It was for *her* sake. Dear little Helen and the rest must be the first consideration. Look here! she really has a very good notion of drawing."

John perceived that his mother was happier than she had ever been, in waiting upon the children, and enjoying the company of Violet, whose softness exactly suited her; while her decision was a comfortable support to one who had all her life been trained round a stake. They drove and walked together; and Lady Martindale, for the first time, was on foot in the pretty lanes of her own village; she had even stopped at cottage-doors, when Violet had undertaken a message while Theodora was out with Percy; and one evening she appeared busy with a small lilac frock that Helen imagined herself to be making. Lady Martindale was much too busy with the four black-eyed living blossoms, to set her heart on any griffin-headed or monkey-faced orchids; and her lord found that she was one of those who would least be sensible of his reductions. Theodora was continually surprised to see how much more successful than herself Violet was in interesting her, and keeping her cheerful. Perhaps it was owing to her own vehemence; but with the best intentions she had failed in producing anything like the present contentment. And somehow, Lord and Lady Martindale seemed so much more at ease together, and to have so much more to say to each other, that their cousin Hugh one day observed, it was their honeymoon.

"I say, John," said Percy, one night, as they were walking to the vicarage, "I wish you could find me something to do in the West Indies!"

"I should be very sorry to export you —"

"I must do something!" exclaimed Percy. "I was thinking of emigration; but your sister could not go in the present state of things here; and she will not hear of my going, and returning when I have built a nest for her."

"No, indeed!" said John. "Your powers were not given for the hewing down of forests."

"Were not they?" said Percy, stretching and clenching a hard muscular wrist and hand.

"A man's a man for a' that!"

I tell you, John, I am wearying for want of work — hard, downright, substantial work!"

"Well, you have it, have you not?"

"Pshaw! Pegasus wont let himself out on hire. I can't turn my sport into my trade. When I find myself writing for the lucre of gain, the whole spirit leaves me."

"That is what you have been doing for some time."

"No such thing. Literature was my holiday friend at first; and if she put a gold piece or two into my pocket, it was not what I sought her for. Then she came to my help to beguile what I thought was an interval of waiting for the serious task of life. I wrote what I thought was wanted. I sent it forth as my way of trying what service I could do in my generation. But now, when I call it my profession, when I think avowedly what am I to get by it? — Faugh! the Muse is disgusted; and when I go to church, I hang my head at 'Lay not up to yourselves treasures upon earth —'"

"A fine way you found of laying them up!"

"It proved the way to get them back."

"I do not understand your objection. You had laid up that sum — your fair earning."

"There it was: it had accumulated without positive intention on my part; I mean that I had of course taken my due, and not found occasion to spend it. It is the writing solely for gain, with malice prepense to save it, — that is the stumbling block. I don't feel as if I was justified in it, nay, I *cannot* do it; my ideas do not flow even on matters wont to interest me most. It was all very well when waiting on Arthur was an object; but after he was gone, I found it out. I could not turn to writing; and if I did, out came things I

was ashamed of. No! an able-bodied man of five-and-thirty is meant for tougher work than review and history-mongering! I have been teaching a ragged-school, helping at any charities that needed a hand; but it seems amateur work, and I want to be in the stream of life again!"

"I will not say what most would — it was a pity you resigned your former post."

"No pity at all. That has made a pair of good folks very happy. If I had kept certain hasty judgments to myself, I should not have been laid on the shelf. It is no more than I deserve, and no doubt it is good for me to be humbled and set aside; but work I *will* get of some kind! I looked in at a great factory the other day, and longed to apply for a superintendent's place, only I thought it might not be congruous with an Honourable for a wife."

"You don't mean to give up writing?"

"No, to make it my play. I feel like little Annie, when she called herself puss without a corner. I have serious thoughts of the law. Heigh ho! Good night."

John grieved over the disappointed tone so unusual in the buoyant Percy, and revolved various devices for finding employment for him; but was obliged to own that a man of his age, whatever his powers, when once set aside from the active world, finds it difficult to make for himself another career. It accounted to John for the degree of depression which he detected in Theodora's manner, which, at all times rather grave, did not often light up into animation, and never into her quaint moods of eccentric determination; she was helpful and kind, but submissive and indifferent to what passed around her.

In fact, Theodora felt the disappointment of which Percy complained, more uniformly than he did himself. He thought no more of it when conversation was going on, when a service was to be done to any living creature, or when he was playing with the children; but the sense of his vexation always hung upon her; perhaps the more because she felt that her own former conduct deserved no happiness, and that his future was involved in hers. She tried to be patient, but she could not be gay.

Her scheme had been for Percy to take a farm, but he answered that he had lived too much abroad, and in towns,

to make agriculture succeed in England. In the colonies perhaps, — but her involuntary exclamation of dismay at the idea of letting him go alone, had made him at once abandon the project. When, however, she saw how enforced idleness preyed on him, and with how little spirit he turned to his literary pursuits, she began to think it her duty to persuade him to go; and to this she had on this very night, with a great effort, made up her mind.

"There is space in his composition for more happiness than depends on me," said she to Violet. "Exertion, hope, trust in me will make him happy; and he shall not waste his life in loitering here for my sake."

"Dear Theodora, I fear it will cost you a great deal."

"Never mind," said Theodora; "I am more at peace than I have been for years. Percy has suffered enough through me already."

Violet looked up affectionately at her fine countenance, and gave one of the mute caresses that Theodora liked from her, though she could have borne them from no one else.

Theodora smiled, sighed, and then, shaking off the dejected tone, said, "Well, I suppose you will have a letter from Wrangerton to tell you it is settled. I wonder if you will go to the wedding. Oh! Violet, if you had had one particle of selfishness or pettiness, how many unhappy people you would have made!"

Violet's last letter from home had announced that Mr. Fanshawe had come to stay with Mr. Jones, and she was watching eagerly for the next news. She went down stairs quickly, in the morning, to seek for her own letters among the array spread on the side-board.

Percy was alone in the room, standing by the window. He started at her entrance, and hardly gave time for a good morning, before he asked where Theodora was.

"I think she is not come in. I have not seen her."

He made a step to the door as if to go and meet her.

"There is nothing wrong, I hope."

"I hope not! I hope there is no mistake. Look here."

He held up, with an agitated grasp, a long envelope with the mighty words, "On her Majesty's service;" and before Violet's eyes he laid a letter offering him a diplomatic appointment in Italy.

"The very thing above all others I would have chosen. Capital salary! Excellent house! I was staying there a week with the fellow who had it before. A garden of gardens. Orange walks, — fountains, — a view of the Apennines and Mediterranean at once. It is perfection. But what can have led any one to pitch upon me?"

Arthur had come down in the midst, and leant over his rejoicing wife to read the letter, while Percy vehemently shook his hand, exclaiming, "There! See! There 's the good time come! Did you ever see the like, Arthur? But how on earth could they have chosen me? I know nothing of this man — he knows nothing of me."

"Such compliments to your abilities and classical discoveries," said Violet.

"Much good they would do without interest! I would give twenty pounds to know who has got me this."

"Ha!" said Arthur, looking at the signature. "Did not he marry some of the Delaval connexion?"

"Yes," said Violet; "Lady Mary — Lord St. Erme's aunt. He was Lord St. Erme's guardian."

"Then that is what it is," said Arthur, sententiously. "Did you not tell me that St. Erme had been examining you about Percy?"

"Yes, he asked me about his writings, and how long he had been at Constantinople," said Violet, rather shyly, almost sorry that her surprise had penetrated and proclaimed what the Earl no doubt meant to be a secret, especially when she saw that Percy's exultation was completely damped. There was no time for answer, for others were entering, and with a gesture to enforce silence, he pocketed the papers, and said nothing on the subject all breakfast time. Even while Violet regaled herself with Annette's happy letter, she had anxious eyes and thoughts for the other sister, now scarcely less to her than Annette.

She called off the children from dancing round uncle Percy after breakfast, and watched him walk off with Theodora to the side arcade in the avenue that always had especial charms for them.

"Theodora, here is something for you to decide."

"Why, Percy!" as she read, "this is the very thing! What! Is it not a good appointment? Why do you hesitate?

"It is an excellent appointment, but this is the doubt. Do you see that name? There can be no question that this is owing to Lord St. Erme."

"I see!" said Theodora, blushing deeply.

"I wish to be guided entirely by your feeling."

They walked the whole length of the avenue and turned again before she spoke. At last she said — "Lord St. Erme is a generous person, and should be dealt with generously. I have given him pain by my pride and caprice, and I had rather give him no more. No doubt it is his greatest pleasure to make us happy, and I think he ought to be allowed to have it. But let it be as you please."

"I expected you to speak in this way. You think that he does not deserve to be wounded by my refusing this because it comes from him."

"That is my feeling; but if you do not like — I believe you do not. Refuse it, then."

"To say I like the obligation would not be true; but I know it is right that I should conquer the foolish feeling. After all it is public work that I am to do, and it would be wrong and absurd to refuse it, because it is he who has brought my name forward."

"You take it, then?"

"Yes, standing reproved, and I might almost say punished, for my past disdain of this generous man."

"If you say so, what must I?"

Percy resolved that, after consulting Lord Martindale, he would at once set off for London, to signify his acceptance, and make the necessary inquiries. Theodora asked whether he meant to appear conscious of the influence exerted in his favour. "I will see whether it was directly employed; if so, it would be paltry to seem to appear unconscious. I had rather show that I appreciate his feeling, and if I feel an obligation, acknowledge it."

"I wonder, Theodora," said Arthur, "that you allow him to go. He is so fond of giving away whatever any one cries for, that you will find yourself made over to St. Erme."

In three days' time Percy returned; Theodora went with Arthur and Violet to meet him at the station.

"Well!" said he, as they drove off, "he is a very fine fellow, after all! I don't know what is to be done for him! I wish we could find a Theodora for him."

"I told you so, Theodora!" cried Arthur. "He has presented you."

"There were two words to that bargain!" said Percy. "He must be content to wait for Helen."

"So instead of my sister, you dispose of my daughter," said Arthur.

"Poor little Helen!" said Violet. "Imagine the age he will be when she is eighteen!"

"He will never grow old!" said Percy. "He has the poet's gift of perpetual youth, the spring of life and fancy that keeps men young. He has not grown a day older since this time five years. I found he had taken a great deal of trouble about me, recommended me strenuously, brought forward my papers on foreign policy, and been at much pains to confute that report that was afloat against me. He treated my appointment as a personal favour; and he is a man of weight now. You were right, Theodora; it would have been abominable to sulk in our corner, because we had behaved ill ourselves, and to meet such noble-spirited kindness as an offence."

"I am very glad that you feel it so," returned Theodora.

"Now that I have seen him I do so completely. And another thing I have to thank you for, Violet, that you saved me from laying it on any thicker in that criticism of his poetry."

"I told you how he said that you had done him a great deal of good."

"A signal instance — almost a single instance of candour. But there is a nobility of mind in him above small resentments and jealousies. Ay! there never will be anybody fit for him but Helen!"

"And Helen brought up to be much better than her aunt," said Theodora.

"It won't be my mother's fault if she is," said Arthur.

"I was determined yesterday to see what she would succeed in making her do, and I declare the sprite drove her

about like a slave — 'Grandmamma, fetch me this,' 'Grandmamma, you must do that,' till at last she brought my poor mother down on her knees, stooping under the table to personate an old cow in the stall."

"Oh! Arthur! Arthur, how could you?" exclaimed Violet. "What were you about to let it go on?"

"Lying on the sofa, setting a good example," said Percy.

"No, no, I did not go that length," said Arthur. "I was *incog.* in the next room; but it was too good to interrupt. Besides, Helen has succeeded to my aunt's vacant throne, and my mother is never so hurt as when Violet interferes with any of her vagaries. The other day, when Violet carried her off roaring at not being allowed to turn grandmamma's work-box inside out, her Ladyship made a formal remonstrance to me on letting the poor child's spirit be broken by strictness."

"I hope you told her that some spirits would be glad to have been broken long ago," said Theodora.

"I only told her I had perfect faith in Violet's management."

Percy was wanted speedily to set off for his new situation, and the question of the marriage became difficult. His income was fully sufficient, but Theodora had many scruples about leaving her mother, whom the last winter had proved to be unfit to be left without companionship. They doubted and consulted, and agreed that they must be self-denying; but John came to their relief. He shrank with a sort of horror from permitting such a sacrifice as his own had been; held that it would be positively wrong to let their union be delayed any longer, and found his father of the same opinion, though not knowing how Lady Martindale would bear the loss. Perhaps his habit of flinching from saying to her what he expected her to dislike, had been one cause of Mrs. Nesbit's supremacy.

John, therefore, undertook to open her eyes to the necessity of relinquishing her daughter, intending to offer himself as her companion and attendant, ready henceforth to devote himself to her comfort, as the means of setting free those who still had a fair prospect.

As usual, Lady Martindale's reluctance had been overrated. John found that she had never calculated on any-

thing but Theodora's marrying at once; she only observed that she supposed it could not be helped, and she was glad her dear aunt was spared the sight.

"And you will not miss her so much when I am at home."

"You, my dear; I am never so happy as when you are here; but I do not depend on you. I should like you to spend this winter abroad, and then we must have you in Parliament again."

"If I were sure that you would be comfortable," said John; "but otherwise I could not think of leaving you."

"I was thinking," said Lady Martindale, with the slowness of one little wont to originate a scheme, "how pleasant it would be, if we could keep Arthur and Violet always with us. I cannot bear to part with the dear children, and I am sure they will all be ill again if they go back to London."

"To live with us!" exclaimed John. "Really, mother, you have found the best plan of all. Nothing could be better!"

"Do you think your father would approve?" said Lady Martindale, eagerly.

"Let us propose it to him," said John, and without further delay he begged him to join the conference. The plan was so excellent that it only seemed strange that it had occurred to no one before, combining the advantages of giving Arthur's health a better chance; of country air for the children, and of economy. Lord Martindale looked very well pleased, though still a little doubtful, as he pondered, whether there might not be some unseen objection, and to give himself time to think, repeated, in answer to their solicitations, that it was a most important step.

"For instance," said he, as if glad to have recollected one argument on the side of caution, "you see, if they live here, we are in a manner treating Johnnie as the acknowledged heir."

"Exactly so," replied John; "and it will be the better for him, and for the people. For my part —"

They were interrupted by Arthur's walking in from the garden. Lady Martindale, too eager to heed that her Lord would fain not broach the question till his deliberations were mature, rose up at once, exclaiming, "Arthur, my dear, I am glad you are come. We wish, when Theodora

leaves us, that you and your dear wife and children should come and live at home always with us. ! Will you, my dear?"

Arthur looked from one to the other in amaze.

"It is a subject for consideration," began Lord Martindale. "I would not act hastily, without knowing the sentiments of all concerned."

"If you mean mine," said John, "I will finish what I was saying, — that, for my part, a home is all that I can ever want; and that for Arthur to afford me a share in his, and in his children's hearts, would be the greatest earthly happiness that I can desire."

"I am sure" — said Arthur, in a voice which, to their surprise, was broken by a sob — "I am sure, John — you have every right. You have made my home what it is."

"Then he consents!" exclaimed Lady Martindale, "I shall have Violet always with me, and Helen."

"Thank you, thank you, mother; but —" His eye was on his father.

"Your mother does not know what she is asking of you, Arthur," said Lord Martindale. "I would not have you engage yourself without consideration. Such arrangements as these must not be made to be broken. For myself, it is only the extreme pleasure the project gives me that makes me balance, lest I should overlook any objection. To have your dear Violet for the daughter of our old age, and your children round us, would, as John says, leave us nothing to wish."

Arthur could only tremulously repeat his "Thank you;" but there was a hesitation that alarmed his mother. "Your father wishes it, too," she eagerly entreated.

"Do not press him, Anna," said Lord Martindale. "I would not have him decide hastily. It is asking a great deal of him to propose his giving up his profession and his establishment."

"It is not that," said Arthur, turning gratefully to his father. "I should be glad to give up the army and live at home — there is nothing I should like better; but the point is, that I must know what Violet thinks of it."

"Right! Of course, she must be consulted," said Lord Martindale.

"You see," said Arthur, speaking fast, as if conscious that he appeared ungracious, "it seems hard that she should have no house of her own, to receive her family in. I had promised she should have her sisters with her this winter, and I do not quite like to ask her to give it up."

"When the house is finished, and we have room," began Lady Martindale, "the Miss Mosses shall be most welcome."

"Thank you, thank you," repeated Arthur. "But besides, I do not know how she will feel about the children. If we are to be here, it must be on condition that she has the entire management of them to herself."

"Certainly," again said his father. "She has them in excellent training, and it would be entirely contrary to my principles to interfere."

"Then, you see how it is," said Arthur. "I am quite willing. I know it is what I do not deserve, and I am more obliged than I can say; but all must depend upon Violet."

He was going in quest of her, when the Rickworth carriage stopped at the gate and prevented him. Poor Lady Martindale, when she had sent her note of invitation to Lady Elizabeth and Emma to spend a long day at Brogden, she little imagined how long the day would be to her suspense. She could not even talk it over with any one but John, and he did not feel secure of Violet's willingness. He said that, at one time, she had been very shy and uncomfortable at Martindale, and that he feared there was reason in what Arthur said about the children. He suspected that Arthur thought that she would not like the scheme, and supposed that he knew best.

"Cannot you try to prevail with her, dear John? You have great influence."

"I should not think it proper to persuade her. I trust to her judgment to see what is best, and should be sorry to distress her by putting forward my own wishes."

This conversation took place while the younger ladies were walking in the garden with Lady Elizabeth and her daughter. It was the first time that Emma had been persuaded to come from home, and though she could not be more quiet than formerly, there was less peculiarity in her manner. She positively entered into the general conversa-

tion, and showed interest in the farming talk between her mother and Lord Martindale; but the children were her chief resource. And, though affectionate and almost craving pardon from Violet, — drawing out from her every particular about the little ones, and asking much about Arthur's health, and Theodora's prospects, — she left a veil over the matters that had so deeply concerned herself.

It was from Lady Elizabeth that the sisters heard what they wished to know; and Theodora, on her side, imparted the information which Percy had brought from London. He had been trying whether it were possible to obtain payment of Mr. Gardner's heavy debts to Arthur, but had been forced to relinquish the hope. So many creditors had claims on him that, ample as was the fortune which Mrs. Finch's affection had placed entirely in his power, there was little probability that he would ever venture to return to England. No notice had been taken of the demands repeatedly sent in, and Percy had learnt that he was dissipating his wife's property very fast upon the Continent; so that it was likely that, in a few years, Mr. Finch's hoards would be completely gone. Report also spoke of his rewarding his wife's affection with neglect and unkindness; and her sister, Mrs. Fotheringham, declared that, having acted against warning, Georgina must take the consequences, and could expect no assistance from Worthbourne.

Mournfully Theodora spoke. It was a saddening thought in the midst of her happiness, and it pressed the more heavily upon her from the consciousness, that she had been looked up to by Georgina, and had in her pride and self-will, forfeited the chance of exerting any beneficial influence. She perceived the contrast between the effect of her own character on others, and that of Violet, and could by no means feel herself guiltless of her poor playmate's sad history. Still she cherished a secret hope that it might yet be permitted to her to meet her again, and in the time of trouble to be of service to her.

This, of course, was not for Lady Elizabeth's ears, but enough was told her to make her again marvel over her daughter's past infatuation, and express her thankfulness for the escape.

Emma's mind was gradually becoming tranquillized, though it had suffered another severe shock from the tidings, that Theresa Marstone had actually become a member of the Roman Catholic Church. A few months ago, such intelligence might have unsettled Emma's principles, as well as caused her deep grief; but the conviction of the undutiful and uncandid part which Miss Marstone had led her to act, had shaken her belief in her friend's infallibility; and in the safe and wholesome atmosphere of her home, there had been a gradual disenchantment. She saw Sarah Theresa in a true light, as a person of excellent intentions, and of many right principles, but entirely unconscious of her own foibles, namely, an overweening estimate of self and of her own opinions, and a love of excitement and dominion. These, growing more confirmed with her years, had resulted in the desertion of her mother-church, under the expectation that elsewhere she might find that ideal which existed only in her own imagination; and Emma had been obliged to acknowledge, that had her work at the Priory been hastily begun, according to her wishes, four years ago, little could have resulted but mischief from such a coadjutor.

Emma's sense of folly and instability made her ready to submit to another five years' probation; but to her surprise, her mother, whom Miss Marstone had taught her to imagine averse to anything out of the ordinary routine, was quite ready to promote her plans, and in fact did much to turn her mind into that channel.

The orphans were doubled in numbers, and Emma spent much time in attending to them; an old woman had been rescued from the Union, and lodged in an adjoining room, as a "granny" to the little girls, giving the whole quite a family air; a homeless governess, in feeble health, was on a visit, which Emma hoped would be prolonged indefinitely, if she could be persuaded to believe herself useful to the orphans. The inhabitants of the house were fast outstripping their space in the parish church, and might soon be numerous enough to necessitate the restoration of the ruin for their lodging. An architect had been commissioned to prepare plans for the rebuilding of the chapel at once, and Lady Elizabeth was on the watch for a chaplain. Thus matters were actually in train for the fulfilment of Emma's

aspiration, spoken so long ago, that "Sunday might come back to Rickworth Priory." Little had she then imagined that she should see its accomplishment commence with so heavy a heart, and enter on her own share of the toil with so little of hope and joy. Alas! they had been wasted in the dreamy wanderings whither she had been led by blind confidence in her self-chosen guide; and youthfulness and mirth had been lost in her rude awakening and recall, lost never to return. Yet in time the calmer joy of "patient continuance in well-doing" would surely arise upon her, and while working for her Master, His hand would lighten her load.

So Violet felt comforted with regard to Emma; and as she stood at the garden-gate with her sister-in-law in the clear, lovely summer night, watching the carriage drive off, smiled as she said, "How well all has turned out! How strange to remember last time I parted with Lady Elizabeth at Brogden, when I was almost equally anxious about Emma, about you and Percy, and about our own affairs — to say nothing of the dreariness for Annette!"

"When the sky is darkest the stars come out," said Theodora. "Yes, the tide in the affairs of men has set most happily in our favour of late; though I don't see our own way yet. John and my father both say, that our marriage must be at once; and I have not made out which is the worst, to desert my mother or to have my own way."

"Which is your own way?" said Violet, archly.

"That is what provokes me! I don't know."

"And which is Percy's?"

"Whichever mine is, which makes it all the worse. Violet! I wish Helen could be put into the hot-house, and made a woman of at once. Only, then, if Lord St. Erme is to have her, it would be equally troublesome."

"My dears, pray come in!" said Lady Martindale, in the porch. "You do not know how late it is."

Her Ladyship was in an unusual hurry to make them wish good night, and come up stairs. She followed Violet to her room, and in one moment had begun,

"Violet, my dear, has Arthur told you?"

"He has told me nothing. What is it?"

"We all think, now Theodora is going to leave us, that it would be the best way for you all to come and live at home with us. Lord Martindale wishes it, and John, and every one. Will you, my dear?"

"How very kind!" exclaimed Violet. "What does Arthur say?"

"Arthur says he is willing, but that it must depend on what you like." Then, perhaps taking Violet's bewildered looks for reluctance, "I am afraid, my dear, I have not always been as affectionate as you deserved, and have not always tried to make you comfortable."

"Oh! no, no! Don't say so!"

"It was before I rightly knew you; and indeed it shall never be so again. We are so comfortable now together; do not let us break it up again, and take the poor dear children away to grow pale in London. You shall have all you wish; I will never do anything you don't like with the children; and all your family shall come and stay whenever you please; only don't go away, dear Violet — I cannot spare you."

"Oh! don't, dear Grandmamma! This is too much," said Violet, almost crying. "You are so very kind. Oh! I should be so glad for Arthur to be spared the London winter! How happy the children will be! Thank you, indeed."

"You do consent, then!" cried Lady Martindale, triumphantly. "John thought we had not made you happy enough!"

"John should know better! It is the greatest relief — if Arthur likes it, I mean."

"Then you do stay. You will be, as Lord Martindale says, the daughter of our old age — our own dear child!"

"Will I?" Violet threw her arms round Lady Martindale's neck, and shed tears of joy.

Lady Martindale held her in her arms, and murmured caressing words. Arthur's step approached. His mother opened the door and met him. "She consents! Dear, dear Violet consents! Now we shall be happy."

Arthur smiled, looked at his wife, understood her face, and replied to his mother with a warm kiss, a thank you, and good night. She went away in perfect satisfaction.

"Your last, greatest victory, Violet," said he. "You have got at her heart at last, and taught her to use it. But, do you like this plan?"

"Like it? It is too delightful! If you knew how I have been dreading that winter in London for your chest!"

"And saying nothing?"

"Because I thought there was nothing else to be done; but this —"

"Ay! I have told my father that, if we stay here, I hope he will lessen my allowance. Even then, I can pay off something every year of the debts that will be left after what would be cleared by the price of my commission."

"Oh, yes; we shall have scarcely any expense at all."

"Don't agree to it, though, because you think I like it, if you do not. Consider how you will get on with grandmamma and the children. She makes promises; but as to trusting her not to spoil Helen —".

"She does not spoil her half as much as her papa does," said Violet, with a saucy smile. "I 'm not afraid. It is all love, you know, and grandmamma is very kind to me, even when Helen is in disgrace. If *we* can only be steady with her, I am sure another person to love her can do her no harm in the end. And, oh! think of the children growing up in the free happy country."

"Ay, my father and John spoke of that," said Arthur. "John wishes it very much. He says that all he could desire in this world is a share in our home and in our children's hearts."

"I don't know how it is that every one is so kind. Oh! it is too much! it overflows!" Violet leant against her husband, shedding tears of happiness.

"You silly little thing!" he said, fondling her; "don't you know why? You have won all their hearts."

"I never meant to" — half sobbed Violet.

"No, you only meant to go on in your own sweet, modest way of kindness and goodness; but you have done it, you see. You have won every one of them over; and what is more, gained pardon for me, for your sake. No, don't struggle against my saying so, for it is only the truth. It was bad enough in me to marry you, innocent, unknowing child, as you were; but you turned it all to good. When I

heard that lesson on Sunday, about the husband and the believing wife, I thought it was meant for you and me; for if ever now I do come to good, it is owing to no one but you and that boy."

"O, Arthur, I cannot bear such sayings. Would you — would you dislike only just kneeling down with me, that we may give thanks for all this happiness! Oh! what seemed like thorns and crosses have all turned into blessings!"

THE END.

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